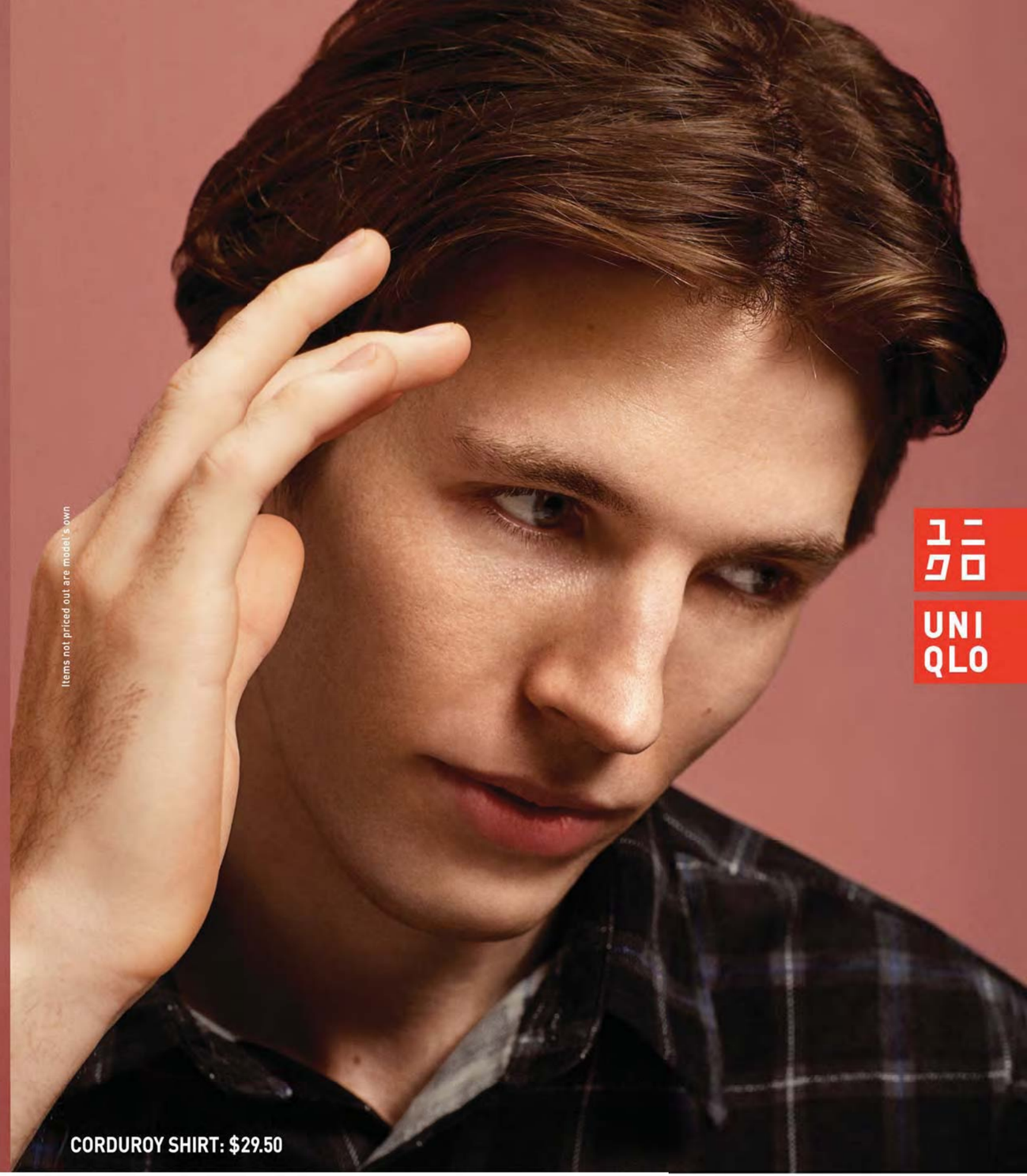
VICE

FREE
VOLUME 13 NUMBER 12

THE FICTION ISSUE

Harmony Korine / Chuck Palahniuk / Neil LaBute
Flannery O'Connor / David Mamet / Charles Willeford
Andrea Dworkin / Fred Armisen / Eileen Myles and more...



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Throughout his 10-year NBA career, Miami Heat forward Antoine Walker has had a penchant for putting up his share of three pointers averaging about 5 per game. Asked once why he puts up so many three balls, 'Toine responded, "Because there aren't any fours".

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We asked a two-and-a-half-year-old friend of ours to tell us what's going on in this photo. He said: "They're getting some exercise tonight. Doing their work."

VOLUME 13
NUMBER 12

Cover photo by Roe Ethridge, shot at Strand Books in New York

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A toddler's take on this photo: "She's talking on her phone and it's messy."

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Legends Of Hip Hop

1980 **Kurtis Blow**
Kurtis Blow
B-Boy sing hit songs. The first rap record on a major label by the first rap artist to go platinum. “The Breaks,” “Way Out West” & “Hard Times.”

1985 **L.L. Cool J**
Radio
Mr. Lover Lover launches Def Jam into the jet stream. Debut album from the first bona fide rap superstar. “Rock The Bells,” “I Need A Beat” & “I Can’t Live Without My Radio.”

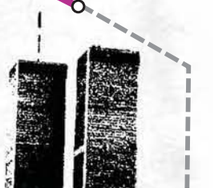
1986 **Beastie Boys**
Licensed To Ill
Punks rock the mic. Mics rocked like punk. The original genre-blender middle-finger party album. “Fight For Your Right,” “No Sleep Till Brooklyn,” “Girls” & “Paul Revere.”

1987 **Eric B. & Rakim**
Paid In Full
The Masterpiece. The record that changed the rap game. Period. With 2 bonus cuts + lyrics. “Paid In Full,” “I Ain’t No Joke” & “I Know You Got Soul.”

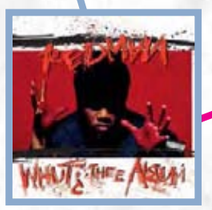
1988 **Public Enemy**
It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back
Light the blaze. The album that forced the world to pay attention. “Bring The Noise,” “Don’t Believe The Hype,” “Party For Your Right To Fight” & “Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos.”

1990 **EPMD**
Business As Usual
Strong Island delivered straight, no chaser. Erick & Parrish’s Def Jam debut and broadest reaching album. “Rampage,” “Gold Digger” & “Give The People.”

1991 **Black Sheep**
A Wolf In Sheep’s Clothing
A freestyle phenom. “Who’s the Black Sheep? What’s the Black Sheep?” You know. “The Choice Is Yours (Revisited),” “Strobelite Honey” & “Flavor Of The Month.”



1992 **Redman**
Whut? Thee Album
Pass the Redman ’pon the left hand side. Red’s cloudy debut album. “Blow Your Mind,” “Time 4 Sum Aksion” & “Tonight’s Da Night.”



1994 **Method Man**
Tical
Dark, demented and damn funny debut from Wu-Tang alum. “Release Yo’ Delf,” “Bring The Pain” & “Tical.”

1995 **The Roots**
Do You Want More?!!??!
Bringing it all back home. The major-label debut from the best band in hip hop. “Distortion To Static,” “Proceed” & “Mellow My Man.”

1998 **Jay-Z**
Vol.2... Hard Knock Life
Three the hard way. Mr. Carter’s third outing. Like the man himself, ruthless, articulate, engaging. “Can I Get A…,” “Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)” & “Money, Cash, Hoes.”

2004 **The Hip Hop Box**
Various Artists
If you don’t know your past, then you don’t know your future. The ‘passing fad’ celebrates 25 years on vinyl. 51 hip hop classics 1979-2003 on 4CDs.

2005 **Def Jam #1’s**
Various Artists
Def Jam tells you who they are. Two decades of chart toppers. Oran “Juice” Jones “The Rain,” Method Man with Mary J. Blige “I’ll Be There For You / You’re All I Need To Get By,” Jay-Z & Pharrell “Excuse Me Miss.”

2005 **Hip Hop Gold**
Various Artists
The cream rises. 32 hip hop gems 1979-2003. Kurtis Blow, Eric B. & Rakim, 3rd Bass, The Pharcyde, Queen Latifah, Common, The Roots, and more.

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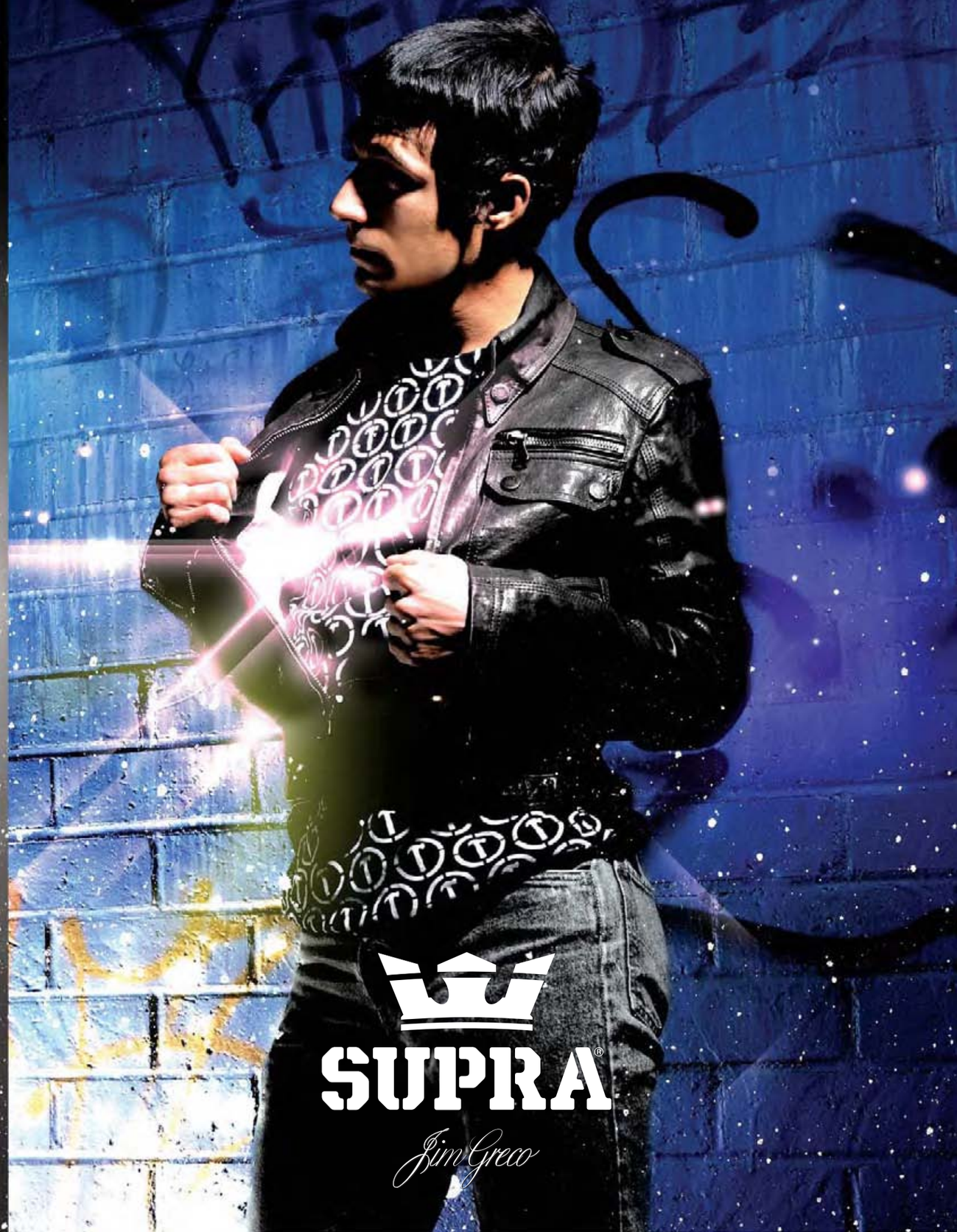

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VICE

FOUNDERS Suroosh Alvi, Gavin McInnes, Shane Smith

COMPTROLLER Richard Bisson

EDITOR Jesse Pearson (jessep@viceland.com)

PUBLISHER Erik Lavoie (erik@viceland.com)

SENIOR EDITOR Amie Barrodale (amie@viceland.com)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Thomas Morton (thomasm@viceland.com)

RAP EDITOR Dave 1 (dave1@viceland.com)

PHOTO EDITOR Patrick O'Dell (patrick@viceland.com)

VICE UK EDITOR Andy Capper (andy@viceuk.com)

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Ben Dietz (ben@viceland.com)

MARKETING MANAGER Ryan Archibald (ryan@viceland.com)

ADVERTISING John Martin (johnm@viceland.com)
Ryan Duffy (ryand@viceland.com)
Thobey Campion (thobey@viceland.com)

PRODUCTION MANAGER Tim McCready (timm@viceland.com)

DISTRIBUTION Lauren Dzura (lauren@viceland.com)

LAYOUT inkubator.ca

WEB DESIGN Solid Sender

DESIGN ASSOCIATE Matt Schoen (matt@viceland.com)

FASHION COORDINATOR Annette Lamothe-Ramos (annette@viceland.com)

GENERAL MANAGER Saul Metnick (saulm@viceland.com)

OFFICE MANAGER John James (johnjames@viceland.com)

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT Liz Cowie (lizc@viceland.com)

MARKETING COORDINATOR Sue Smith (sue@viceland.com)

ACCOUNTANTS Richard Ouellette, Bianca Belley

WORDS
Lesley Arfin, Fred Armisen, Sam Brumbaugh, Dawn Chan, Stephen Dixon, Andrea Dworkin, Tibor Fischer, Niall Griffiths, Richard Hell, Jeff Johnson, Blaise Kearsley, Amy Kellner, Harmony Korine, Neil Labute, Mary Mendelbaum, Eileen Myles, Chuck Palahniuk, Jocko Weyland, Charles Willeford

PHOTOS
Roe Ethridge, Laurel Nakadate, Brenda Staudenmaier, Alex Sturrock, Jaimie Warren, Ed Zipco

ILLUSTRATIONS
Milano Chow, Vanessa Davis, David Mamet, Flannery O'Connor, Johnny Ryan

COPY EDITOR Sam Frank

INTERNS Alex Witjas, Carina Jensen, Bobby Farrington, Annie Zuckerman, Rachel Lucas Craig, Graham Keay, Najva Soleimani, Sarah Hartzog, Emilia Perez, Sean Higgins, Anthony Lowe

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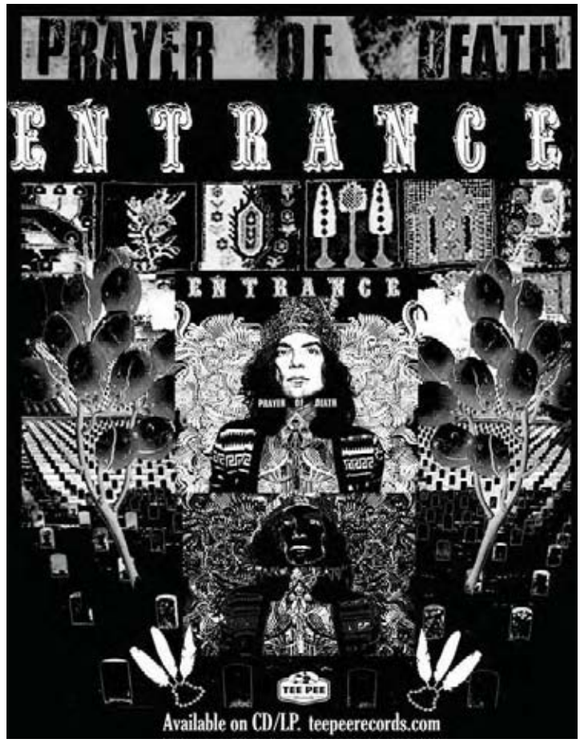

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Phone +81-3-5766-0697
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EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

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LAUREL NAKADATE Laurel Nakadate is a photographer and video artist. She's really good at it too. This fall, her work was shown at the Mary Boone Gallery, the Asia Society, and solo at Danziger Projects. Her art is funny, sad, smart, and like, um, big-time sexually charged. We think she's one of the best artists going right now, but we don't have the guts to say that to her face. Also, Laurel is half-Japanese, but she doesn't like sushi and she was raised in Iowa. What the fuck is that about?

Laurel has a photo on page 100.

ED ZIPCO Ed was one of those "where the fuck did this stuff come from?" guys that we see every couple of years here. They are a special breed. You see, we get bombarded with shitty photos by shitty college-graduate types all the time. To come across an Ed, with his seemingly bottomless supply of crazy pictures of attractive young people doing insane shit and damaged old people doing sad shit, is like a new lease on life. We're not even exaggerating.

Ed's photos are on the two Table of Contents pages in this issue.

BRENDA STAUDENMAIER Brenda started out taking DON'Ts for us at various Gino bars throughout New York City. Then she graduated to hipster bars and now she just walks around with a camera and photographs anyone with pants worth commenting on. Even though she has been a crucial contributor to our most popular column, this is the first time we've had her on the contributors page. This is because her last name is a bitch to spell. If you can bother typing out brendastaudenmaier.com you can see everything she's done for us as well as a number of saucy portfolios she's photographed for nudie tattooed-harlot site Burning Angel.

Brenda has a bunch of photos in every issue.

JOHN JAMES This kid John James is our new office manager. He also helps us get done all of the hundreds of errands that go into making a magazine. He ends up doing a lot of the things interns are supposed to do, but we go to him because he's reliable and easy to talk to. He runs, surfs, and calls his grandmother daily. He's traveled the world over, and has lived in Brazil, Nicaragua, Morocco, Portugal, Alaska, and New Zealand. Oh, and ladies, he's single. Just kidding, he's not single at all. His girlfriend took this pic.

John is sitting up there in the front of the office doing stuff all the time.

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ANTI-CUSSWORD LEAGUE

Dear *Vice*,

I find your reporting efforts interesting and heroic. You have incredible potential to educate so many people in a positive way but you are really cutting off a large group of people by using profanity in your stories. In some ways it may even discredit some of your efforts. Please seriously consider media for the many not the few. If you need more details I will gladly send my feedback. Thanks for your efforts in opening a new world of information.

DAVE NOTHELFER
Fremont, CA

If we need more details you will gladly send... Do you mean you'll teach us how not to curse? We've been working on that, actually. The best method is the classic Swear Jar. Every time somebody here says a bad word, we drop an imaginary nickel in an invisible jar. Then we try to care so hard that our ears and eyes bleed.

R.I.P. RAP

Hey *Vice,*

Could you guys please, PLEASE do an issue about the end of hip-hop? I can't stand to see another XXXXXXXXXXXL t-shirt or hear another obnoxious schoolkid speaking mega-Ebonics to the point where he/she sounds literally retarded. For real. It was fun at the beginning but now it's so far down the shit-slide that it's just sad. Bling is gay, tough-guy attitude is so played out it's almost back to funny, and to all the fresh young rappers, let me guess: You're going to be dropping science about a) how hard it was in the beginning but now you're livin' large and no one can touch you, b) how tight your rhymes are and how sick your flow is, or c) how you're bringing it back to the old school and are against the "bling" and the "hype" and you're here to rock the block with all the flip-flop tonight. The only rappers who were any good were Eazy E, Biggie Smalls (enough with all the "tribute" wear), and Big L, and they're all dead.

JOEL BEDFORD
Via email

Vice Rap Editor Dave 1 replies: "Dude, you gots to chill. If anything, we're finna do an issue about how hip-hop is in better shape than ever. Back in the so-called golden era, rap was just a giant sausage party. Nowadays, if you're an eight-year-old Puerto Rican girl, you got 'Chicken Noodle Soup.' If you're a hood rat, you got 'Walk It Out.' If you're into your crack, the Clipse just made a classic album. If you're a jock in Ecko jogging pants, the Game just put out a banger. There's something for everyone. Biggie, Big L, Eazy-E? No disrespect, but there's no more room for those old farts. Proof is, Jay-Z's new record is schmutz. On the other hand, Three 6 Mafia encompasses everything this magazine ever stood for. So what's the problem? Let your chain hang low."

GET IT RIGHT, GAYLORDS

Dear *Vice*,

First off, let me start by saying that I love the magazine and I have been reading it for about three years. But I want to vent about you mentioning the Gaylords. Firstly, the name is an acronym. GAYLORDS stands for—and you are gonna love this—"Great American Youth Love Our Race Destroy Spics." This is what it really used to mean back in the day. They were pretty established as a gang about 15 years ago if not longer with many branches located here in the city of Chicago. Now they probably only have three to four active branches in the city. Second, no one wears sweaters anymore—not since like the early 80s. There were all kinds of sweaters, party and war sweaters. Every gang had them. You can find a whole bunch of bullshit on the topic online if you decide to do so. Among the other gangs in the city that used an acronym were the POPES—"Protectors Of People Eliminate Spics." It no longer means this—it now stands for "Eliminate Stones," which is a reference to a gang by the name of the Familia Stones, originally known as the Puerto Rican Stones. I was also hoping you could have mentioned some of the other local favorites: Satan's Disciples, Spanish Cobras, Maniac Latin Disciples, and Two-Six, just to name a few. The majority are Hispanic Folk gangs.

Oh and by the way, there are no more BGDs, only GDs and BDs. They war with each other on the street. When they are one gang is when you are in the joint and they are your "first cousins," which means you have rode with each other.

KRISTIAN BADILLO
Chicago, IL

MOON GUY

Vice,

As a Moonie, I must and will say that I enjoyed your article on the Moonies immensely. I'm a second gen in New York myself. I'm 22 years old, which by the tradition of this church means that I'm ripe and ready to find myself a suitable owner for this sexual organ, aka these genitalia of mine. However, I am single—an aspiring filmmaker and writer whose ambition is, through his works, to add a quality of integrity and goodness to the entertainment world. In other words, my aim is to take "goodness" out of the realm of corny and into the realm of... I'm still trying to figure out the right word, but something along the lines of "hip" or "fly." Anyway, many people are already doing this, I simply would like to do it, too.

If you ever decide to write another article on the Moonies or if you'd like to further consider joining us in our tenacious undertaking to return this world back into the bosom of our Heavenly Father, I would suggest speaking to the second gen and keeping a fair distance from the 43rd Street headquarters, which has a tendency to attract our less stable and more "dumpy" members.

But yeah, thanks for not completely making fun of us. Personally, it means a lot.

JASON
From viceland.com

PS: Half-Asians usually come out pretty sexy, and sexiness is a damn hard thing to persecute from any point of view.

That's nice. Best of luck on your quest to redeem the sullied name of goodness.

AVERTING MIDLIFE CRISIS

Vice,

This is not an ass kiss, more of a sincere thank-you. I am not a part of *Vice*'s demographic—37, married with three kids, ages 10, 8, and 6. I am, however, always drawn to your magazine because it shows a side to society that us comfortably numb old farts can peer into and then ponder the world around us. Your Kids Issue is a world closer to home but then I realized not so close. For example your letter from Bucharest was bold and important, and it highlights issues that many of the comfortably numb never really appreciate. Thank you for doing what you do and not falling into the abyss of dumbing down the magazine to cater exclusively to what is hip. I think it takes courage to do what you do because that close line might be too close for some advertisers, but you have the balls to go there.

Sincerely,

ERIC DEWHIRST
Ottawa, ON

Thanks, old-timer.

Send correspondence to vice@viceland.com
(include city and state/province) or to Vice Magazine,
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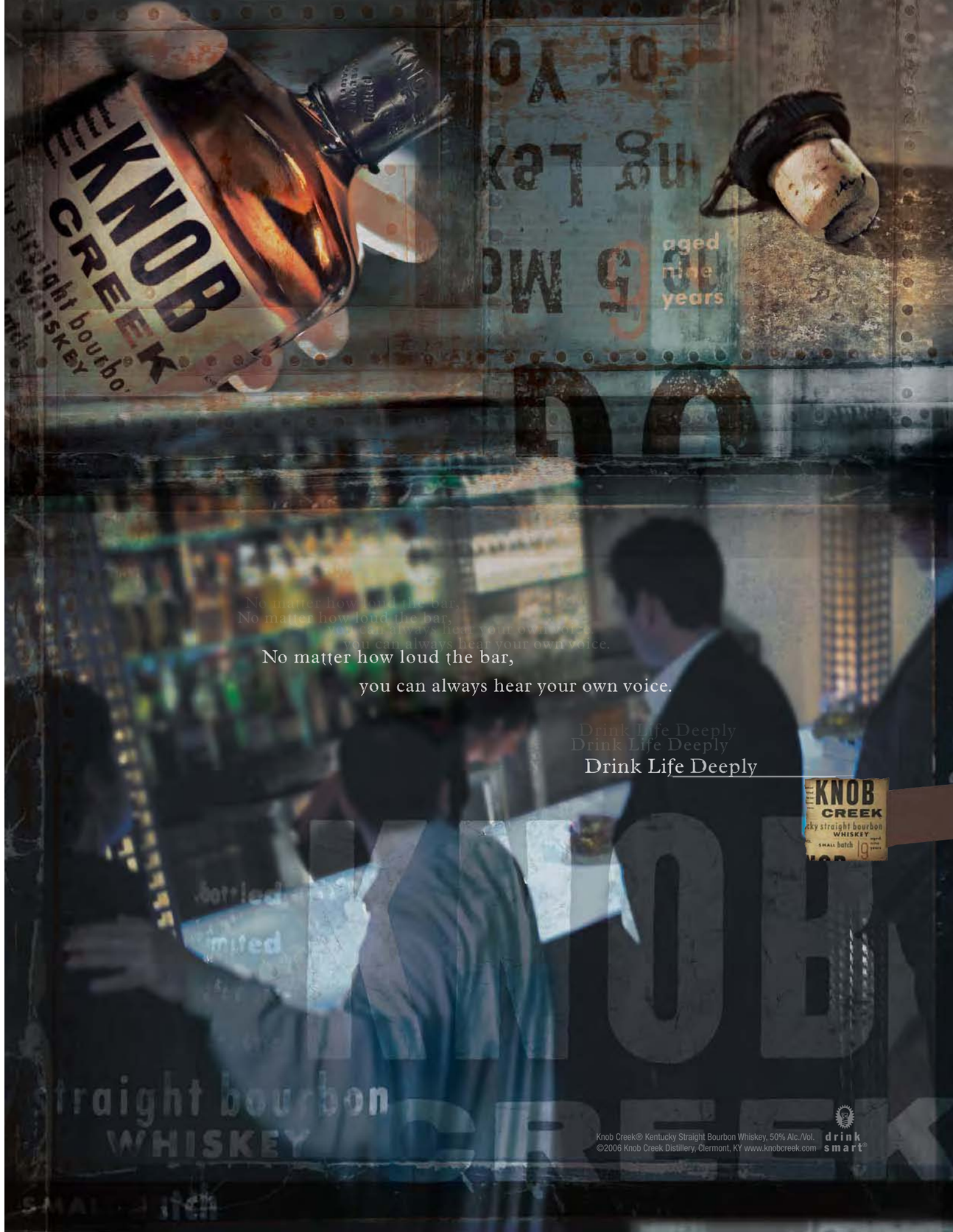
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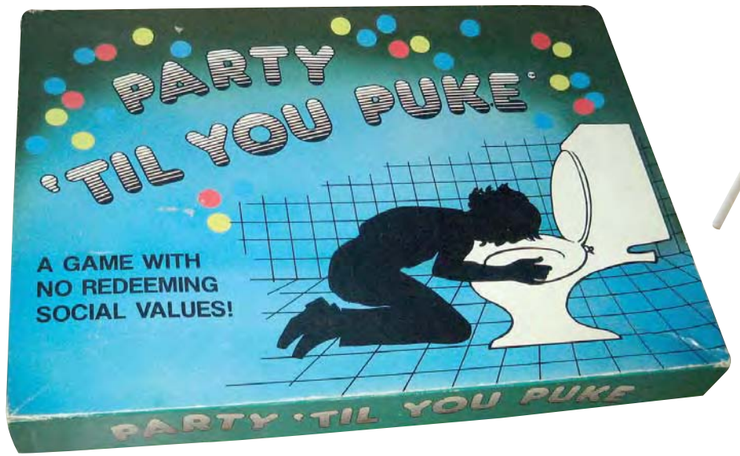

DRINKING BOARD GAME

If you're going to release a board game you might as well spend more than ten minutes putting it together. The squares on this game say things like "Someone insults you—miss a turn" and "Put a lampshade on your head and dance around." After playing it for two hours we realized we were actually *losing* our buzz, which led to us throwing the game at the wall, laughing, and then getting so hammered Sarah barfed. So, it works!

Thanks Max Groth from New York

MINI TOOTSIE ROLL POPS

"Dear *Vice*,
I don't care if these get into the mag or not but they are really delicious. I keep a bowl of them on my desk at work. They're nice because you don't have to waste too much time getting to the center.
Sincerely,
ALLY DAVEY
Toronto, ON"

ROCKIN' VEGGIES

In the same way *pimpin'* has come to mean "any person or thing that is in particularly good condition or at least looks like it is," *rocking* has come to mean "fun and good and not to be frowned upon." This is because kids are fucking idiots.

Thanks Nancy Lopez from Wilmington, CA

BLACK CUNT

This is an Australian jam that the factory occasionally, accidentally "*Mad* fold-ins" into a woman's vagina if she freezes to death, which is not appetizing at all.

MOMUS DOLL

We tried to get fucked-up with this doll and go gallivanting all over New York screaming at people and getting in fights and fingering prostitutes, but it said, "I'd much rather stay here with the other toys and listen to Takako Minekawa if you don't mind." Then it closed its eye and went to sleep. WTF?

ASIAN COLOGNE DEODORANT

Though Asians rarely stink, American companies have duped them into buying deodorant "body spray" by pushing the macho thing way further than Axe would ever dare. Apparently they are even dumber than kids.

DESIRE

Oh Lord Jesus Christ in heaven above. Desire is a mono-named mulatto who sent us his debut double CD along with a three-page bio that breaks down his life into: Desire as a boy, Desire as a young man, and Desire as the artist you know and love today. Apparently he was abused as a child and then became homeless and then lived in a guy's garage until things got so bad the only way he could make money was to invest in films (seriously, that's what it says). Taking a speed-reading course didn't help things. It made him TOO aware of his surroundings until all he could do was write music and lyrics and be an artist that is way too intense for most of us to handle (including the love of his life who rejected him despite his genius). The music that comes out of all this insanity is a weird combination of the Kids of Widney High, the Doodlebops, Wesley Willis, and Yanni and it is impossible to get out of your head.

Go to ilovedesire.com to buy the CD and spend as long as possible at that site. Trust us. You will never be the same again.

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TIDBITS (A MONTHLY LOOK AT THE THINGS WE LOVE)

VICTORIAN HOMEBOY

Eeeew. What is this thing? It's middle-American hokey granny art combined with a weirdly offensive idea of what black culture is and every part of it makes you cringe like someone's shining a flashlight in your face in the middle of the night. PS: Look at his little boots (pronounced "bewts").

KUM CONTAINER

You know that girl you see hanging around your friend that used to be an intern or a mistress or something and then she sort of elbowed her way in there and now she's the boss of him? She can pretend the past never happened but you know exactly what she is and what she always will be.

CLONE-A-PUSSY

We put the dick version of this in the Tidbits a while ago and it seemed to make sense because a good dick is hard to find, so if your guy goes away on business for two weeks you want to simulate his greatness (or at least that's what we'd like to think). But are pussies that special? I mean, the size of the hole matters, but all this clone thing can do is simulate the labia on the outside. Who's into their girlfriend's labia? And why is so much of *Vice*'s "Monthly Look at the Things We Love" things we think are gay?

NEW ELPH

Call it brand loyalty but it seems like the Elph just keeps getting better and better. People keep showing us fancy Japanese things with giant screens but those screens always get cracked and nothing seems to fit in your front pocket better than an Elph (that's more important than you think because the more convenient the camera is to carry the more you carry it and the more you carry it the more good pictures you get). This 7.1-megapixel version is about the same price as the first one and it looks like an old Jaguar or Merc. One huge downer though is you have to lug around a big dock for it every time you want to download your pictures.

WINNER: DRINKING BOARD GAME BECAUSE IT'S SO RETARDED.

TO WIN YOUR FREE SUBSCRIPTION TO *VICE*, SEND TIDBITS TO VICE MAGAZINE, 97 NORTH 10TH STREET, SUITE 202, BROOKLYN, NY, USA 11211.

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THIS PAGE:
- SHOPPING FOR RARE BOOKS
- CELEB READING RECOMMENDS

FICTION

"I remember I couldn't put it down when I started reading it, so I kept going until I completed the fucker."

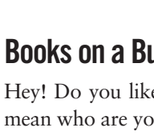
Books on a Budget

Hey! Do you like spending shitloads of money on stuff you don't really need? I mean who are you, really, if you can't drop a couple thou here and there on whatever-the-fuck? What's the point of even drawing another breath if you can't live a little? This is the Fiction Issue, so we thought we'd give you our suggestions for rare books—always a noble way to go into debt. (We also gave you another option for each price, but big whup. Books are what really matters!)
DAWN CHAN

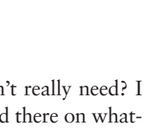
If you are shopping in the $150,000 price range, you have two options: You could buy this edition of *The Three Musketeers* by Dumas, which was printed in Paris in 1844 and retains its publisher's wrappers, or you could buy a pied-à-terre in central Paris.

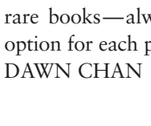
In *De la Democratie en Amerique*, Tocqueville analyzed America's obsession with making money. For $50,000, you can buy this first edition, of which only 500 copies were printed in 1835, or you could have fully cooked organic meals delivered to your door for five years.

Though Longfellow's *Evangeline* isn't anything special, this version has something special going for it: "Cosway binding." That means its cover has painted-ivory medallions and gold curlicues. At $95,000, you can buy this, or you can fly to England and have 10 suits and 20 shirts hand-tailored for you. Shoes? Oh yeah, fly over to Italy and get up to ten pairs made.

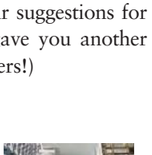


Bligh's *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The text here derives from various newspaper accounts and hearsay regarding the mutiny, rather than Bligh's official account, which came out later on in 1790. A scarce survival, you could purchase this for $17,500 or you could have a personal Pilates instructor work with you one-on-one for the next two years.





Here are first editions of *The Jungle Book* and *The Second Jungle Book*. Notice the beautiful gold detailing on the cover. You could buy these books, valued at $7,500, or you could hire 15 servants for 50 years in the jungles of central India and buy a house and save ten acres of rainforest.



This copy of *George Gershwin's Song-Book* is special because of its signed message by Gershwin: "To Lou Huston—My sincere good wishes. George Gershwin." Though no one knows who Lou Huston was, Gershwin's autograph brings the value of this copy to $9,500. This piece, or two years of private music lessons with a Julliard instructor, would make a fine present for any young music lover.

Chris Cunningham

What's your favouite novel? *Winnie The Pooh* by A.A Milne.
Why? It's the only book I have read more than once. About 12 times, actually! I like Piglet and Pooh equally—maybe Piglet a bit more.

Abbath, Immortal

What's your favorite novel? *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.
Why? It's simply a masterpiece. I remember I couldn't put it down when I started reading it, so I kept going until I completed the fucker.

Jay-Z

What's your favorite novel? I read a lot, but mostly it's books about things like karma and life. I'm interested in life. I read a lot about life. It helps me shape what I'm talking about in the right way. I believe that, for me, what helps the most is wearing one face and dealing with truth. I think truth trumps any kind of business manual you could read.

Momus

What's yor favourite novel? *The Trial* by Franz Kafka.
Why? It gave my favorite Scottish band, Josef K, its name. And the grim yet funny tale just gets more apt as I get older. The effort of the self-righteous, yet deeply guilty bank clerk at the center of the novel to take any and every tiny glimpse of progress in his "case" as an indication that he's achieving grace and won't "die like a dog" resembles my own pathetically erectile optimism in the face of cruel, arbitrary, powerful "courts," like the music industry and the love of women.

Danny Supa
wears the ***Lock Up*** *(3045)*

arnette
www.arnette.com

"He masturbates often, and the number of times he messes his diaper will amaze and thrill many readers." —from DPF's synopsis of "Behind Closed Doors."

Shitty Fiction

People who get off on wearing diapers are the oldest news on the planet. Web-based fan fic/slash fic/whatever has been so played out by this point that it's almost as boring as regular fic. Actually, pretty much any fetish you can come up with was *Donahue*'d to death decades ago and anything at all you can find on the internet has a shelf life of about one "Huh?"

But while it would seem like we're exhausting our supply of interesting weird shit to gape at faster than it can replenish itself, something wonderful has happened. Instead of withering away in shame at their viral notoriety, many of the butts of OMGs past have soldiered on, creating vast reserves of unsettling artwork and writing just waiting for rediscovery.

Case in point, the Adult Baby community. Thought they disappeared after all the hee-hawing we did about them a few years back? Nope. They bought laptops, and since these saddies were last on anybody's radar, their swelling ranks have produced a body of literature easily rivalling a locked roomful of monkeys with typewriters.

Though they're all basically about the same thing—their protagonist's regression from grown-up to babydom through numerous episodes of incontinence—there are two distinct schools of Adult Baby fiction. The first are tales like the 50-chapter masterpiece "The Double Life of Ariel Crawford," in which characters realize they're into diapers and begin acting out their fantasies in graphic, graphic, *graphic* detail. These could be categorized as AB lit's "Realist" school if not for recurring improbabilities such as the ready availability of oversize cribs, or anybody in the world being cool with their boyfriend suddenly just shitting himself. The second, far more common AB school comprises stories that involve characters who are forced into incontinence via torture, blackmail, or, more often than would probably be expected, hypnosis—all to their eventual pleasure.

Due to the rate at which new Adult Baby sites get trolled out of existence, it can be hard to track down a steady source of fresh material. Aspiring auteurs regularly post new stories to the "Novels" forum at infantalism.org, but the real clearinghouse is dpf.com, site of the 20-year-old Diaper Pail Friends, which has amassed an archive some 300 nauseating stories and "novelettes" strong (most replete with some of the most disturbing pencil illustrations you'll ever be told an adult was responsible for).

DPF charges for each story, generally $3 to $5 based on length, but if you're unwilling to sacrifice a couple bucks and a gmail account, you can still kill your appetite just browsing the site's synopses. They've got a search engine with 26 categories ("shaving," "incest," "sissyboy," and "dirty, messy diapers" among them) you can mix and match to return showstoppers like this review for "Diapered and Humiliated":

"Even as a little boy Greggie always had trouble keeping his pants dry, and was often diapered by his mom and grandma. By the age of 13 he learns that it is fun to cum in his diapers without even touching himself. THEN he meets Nancy, who blackmails him into becoming her teen baby slave. Her girlfriends join in giving him bottles and forcing him to wet and cum helplessly in his diaper again and again, even in school. She even tricks him into sucking a boy's pacifier. That's when Greggie realizes he is bisexual and will be diaper dependent at night for the rest of his life. This is a GREAT story."
HARLAN THRAYS

Illustration from hypno-fic classic "My Brother Ritchie." ©dpf.com

Kele Okereke, Bloc Party

What's your favorite novel? *Another Country* by James Baldwin.
Why? It very eloquently discusses race relations in 1950s America. It's very rare for me to read a book that completely understands my viewpoint on this world. Because of that, it has always had a special place in my heart.

Tony Foresta, Municipal Waste

What's your favorite novel? We dig *Lords of Chaos* by Michael Moynihan.
Why? Because they burn down churches. We also like *American Hardcore* by Steven Blush because it has a photo of the Accused in it.

Bill Callahan, aka Smog

What's your favorite novel? *The Assistant* by Bernard Malamud.
Why? It starts out with an old woman buying a bread roll for three cents. The grocer finds an unseeded one for her and slices it in half. It's ten after six in the morning and she's been waiting in the cold since six. That's right up my alley.

Troy Sanders, Mastodon

What's your favorite novel? *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell
Why? Collectively, this is Mastodon's favorite novel. It heavily inspired our *Blood Mountain* record, paralleling his theory of the journey of the archetypal hero found in world mythologies and religions to the travels and obstacles we face and conquer as a band!

"Your customers are too lazy to go on eBay themselves, and they also want to feel like they bought their 'rare' book from a fancy guy."

How to Be a Shady Rare-Book Dealer

For about a year, I worked for a shady rare-book dealer. He did his business online, and I only saw him leave his Chinatown loft once. He presented himself as a member of the royal family, was always tan, and had pudgy, pillowy hands. I will now divulge his secrets.

You probably can guess the basics. If you want to be a shady rare-book dealer, your name should sound understated and call to mind a little storefront in the Hamptons. Your listings should sound like a bored earl wrote them. Also, you must be ruthless about every penny.

What you probably don't know is that you should, right now, go and list 15 copies of Madonna's *Sex*, Frank Thomas's *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*, and Pamela des Barre's *I'm With the Band: Confessions of a Groupie* on Abebooks.com and half.com. It doesn't matter if you have the books in hand, just do it. List them at several different prices. Undersell the other guy by $1.00, sell at midrange, and sell at the top.

Now it is time to buy stock. At any given moment, there will be about 400 copies of *Sex* and a couple copies of *Disney Animation* selling on eBay. You can sell the Disney book for about $50 and the Madonna for around $100, so do the math. Therein lies the only secret to being a rare-book dealer: Your customers are too lazy to go on eBay themselves, and they also want to feel like they bought their "rare" book from a fancy guy.

Finding copies of des Barre's book is a little tricky. You should search through the big lots of paperbacks on eBay. If you find a lot that has the Morrow/Avon/Beech Tree edition of *Confessions of a Groupie* in it, buy! When the box comes in the mail, throw out everything but the des Barres.

As you advance, you'll widen your inventory. It's learn-as-you-go. A good thing to do is to check the top ten movies each week. If there are any movies based on books, then the first editions of those books will be selling. Learn by doing, and remember the most important rule: You have every book in stock. Because really, with the internet the way it is, it takes half an hour to find anything in the world.

MARY MENDELBAUM

Sex

We bought it for $24.99 + $16.50 shipping (it is the Japanese version but that's fine for this book).
We're reselling it on Abebooks for $74 (underselling lowest bidder by a dollar).
Profit: $40.75

Disney Animation

We bought it for $34.99 + $15 shipping and handling.
We're reselling it for $60.
Profit: $10.01. Not a great turnaround on this one, but we had to list it at $60 to be the lowest-priced option on the resell site. So you'd be better off not buying the Frank now. Check back next week.

Confessions of a Groupie

We got the 1988 (not as good as the 1987, but still sellable) for $9.99 on eBay + $3.99 shipping.
We're reselling it for $26 and still underselling the next guy by $2.
Profit: $12.02

"HI, HEY" by Vanessa Davis

Pitbull

What's your favorite novel? *48 Laws of Power* by Robert Greene.
That isn't a novel, but OK, why? It teaches you how to gain and distribute power—an essential skill to make it to the top in the rap game.

Conrad Keely, ...And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead

What's your favorite novel? Novels are so serialized now, it's easier to talk about a series or trilogy than one book. I'm currently reading Neil Stephenson's *Baroque Cycle*, which is off to an amazing beginning, but since I'm not finished I don't feel qualified to give a full review. Instead I will mention George R.R. Martin's *Song of Fire and Ice*, which is currently on its fourth installment of medieval depravity, replete with murder, incest, and dwarves (the cripples, not the magical beings).

Annie Hardy, Giant Drag

What's your favorite novel? I really don't know. I read, but then I give the book away so when I go look at my book collection they are all ones I've yet to read. But I like *Women* by Charles Bukowski an awful lot.

James Righton, Klaxons

What is your favorite novel? *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway.
Why? It's a short story about an old Cuban fisherman trying to catch a fish. I once went fishing and didn't catch anything so I can appreciate the struggle the fisherman went through.

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Harmony Korine

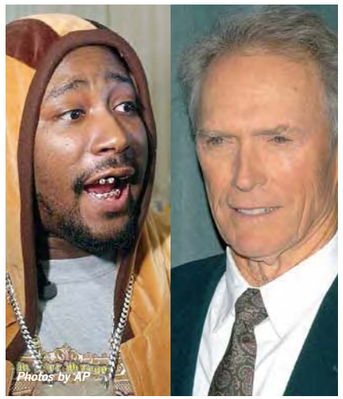
Vice: What is your daily writing routine like?
Harmony: *I've never had one.*
Well, what did you do today?
Listened to a record by Mel Street. Read an interview with Jerry Lee Lewis. Clipped my nails. Had a thought about an old friend of mine named Goldnutts.
Who's Goldnutts?
He was a friend of mine from Nashville. His name was really Goldberg, but he came from California and all the girls liked him, hence his nickname. One year he just left and we never heard from him again. He has become almost mythic in certain circles of Tennessee. A lesbian I know claims to have seen him working at the Alamo a few years back, but there is no proof that it was really him.
How come you write?
Mainly to get the thoughts out of my head.

From THE DIAPER OF BIG BABY JESUS

a forthcoming novel

The following is a conversation I recorded between Ol' Dirty Bastard and Clint Eastwood at a special screening in Los Angeles for the film *The Bridges of Madison County*. This is only a small portion of a much-longer four-hour-plus transcript. This as-yet-unseen transcript will serve as a guide to a 1,000-page novel I am currently writing that is tentatively entitled *The Diaper of Big Baby Jesus*.

ODB: Why are you dressed like a pilgrim?
CE: A pilgrim?
ODB: Yes, with that hat. Those shoes look like Thanksgiving shoes too.
CE: It's for a movie I'm doing.
ODB: Why would you do a movie with those shoes?
CE: I'm trying to get into character.
ODB: Are you playing a gay?
CE: A gay?
ODB: To me they look like a gay's shoes.
CE: Why would I gaze at my shoes?
ODB: No, a gay's shoes.
CE: I thought you said I look like a pilgrim.
ODB: What's the difference?
CE: There's a big difference I think.
ODB: You still like Dirty Harry?
CE: What do you mean?
ODB: Do you like Dirty Harry?
CE: Sure I like him. He was a good character to play.
ODB: When I was a boy I used to dress my sister up like Dirty Harry but instead I called her Dirty Mary. She was messed up. I remember on one of those days she was chasing me with a gun and I threw her into a woodpile.
CE: Why?
ODB: Because she was taking it real. The bitch thought she was you.
CE: Oh yeah?
ODB: And she got a big splinter in her foot.
CE: I bet that hurt.
ODB: I'm sure it hurt but I had to remind Dirty Mary that she wasn't Dirty Harry, for real.
CE: Right.
ODB: The oddest thing about it was that the splinter in her foot was in the shape of the



Virgin Mary.
CE: Right.
ODB: It looked just like the Virgin Mary.
CE: Why are you so wary?
ODB: Wary?
CE: That's what you said?
ODB: No, not wary... Mary... I said the Virgin Mary. Her splinter looked like the Virgin Mary.
CE: Oh.
ODB: How old are you anyway?
CE: Too old.
ODB: The point of it was gonna be that people were praying to my sister's foot.
CE: Why did they do that?
ODB: Because her splinter looked religious. All the people in the projects were lining up to pray at my sister's foot.
CE: Because the splinter was in the shape of the Virgin Mary?
ODB: Exactly, Clintdog.
CE: No, I'm vegetarian.
ODB: Vegetarian?
CE: No hot dogs for me.
ODB: I said "Clintdog," not hot dogs.
CE: Yes, I gave up meat in the spring of '82.
ODB: That's the same year I quit school.
CE: It was a good year for me.
ODB: I got engaged that year to my pastor... a female pastor.
CE: It did fly by much faster.
ODB: What?
CE: For some reason 1982 seems like a blur. It was one of those years that seems a dream now. It was a perfect year for me.
ODB: I can't believe I'm sitting here with you now.
CE: Yes. It is strange.
ODB: You're like an American icon and I'm like the truest American icon.
CE: Yes, my children love your music. They say you're one of the best.
ODB: And you know Dirt Dog loves the children?
CE: Yes.
ODB: Because her splinter looked religious. Two American originals... two Frank Sinatras.
CE: Yes. He had blue eyes.

HARMONY KORINE

Illustration by Milano Chow

Jocko Weyland

Vice: When did you get the idea to do really short stories?

Jocko: *The short answer is my friend Moni Mueller who does a radio show in Berlin asked a bunch of writers to write a 200-word story on the theme "Wednesday 3 PM." I wrote about my neighbor kids playing in the aboveground pool, yelling "Marco Polo" over and over and the ice cream truck coming by. Short and sweet. About six months later I read it again and had a eureka moment: "I'm going to write more of these." The longer answer combines the story for Moni with a general feeling of not having an interest in writing "short stories" in the usual format, of being bored with writing them and bored with reading them by others. Things start bubbling up as possible inspirations and influences: Joe Brainard's* I Remember, *Sam D'Alessandro, Eileen Myles, the lyrics of the Minutemen and Flipper, and poems my father wrote in the 1950s. It was about an economy of words, of telling a story in the way you would say it in conversation, of trying to capture the reality of experience without being a windbag.*

How long does it take to write one?

From five minutes to an hour.

TWO REALLY SHORT STORIES

IN MEMORY

Jenny went to the pool to pick up her mother who was very excited and the first thing she said was, "I just swam with a dead guy!" It was at a pool in Frankfurt where mostly older people went and had a social time, not a real serious lap-swimming place. People were friendly and formal in that German way, swimming along next to each other and shaking hands in the water. Jenny's mother went there all the time and there was one man she always saw that came every day. An older gay man who always dressed well, fastidiously, and wore a toupee. A serious swimmer who did his laps and said hello to everybody and shook hands. On that day he was there as usual when Jenny's mom leisurely did her laps and then she noticed some kind of commotion so she stopped and saw the man being dragged out of the pool where he lay on his back at the edge with one arm in the water. Another woman stopped swimming and Jenny's mother said, "Do you know what is going on?" and the woman replied, "He's dead, he's definitely dead." Very nonchalant. He lay there with his arm falling further into the water. The lifeguards had left to call the ambulance but it was too late. It was just the two women in the almost empty pool and the corpse and now one of his legs slid into the water also. Jenny's mother said, "Dead, really, are you sure?" and the other woman said, "Yes, he's really dead." "Shouldn't we get out of the pool or something because he's dead?" and the other lady answered, "Life and death are so close together so what does it matter, he's passed on and they are coming to take him so why don't we keep swimming?" She'd recently been in Mexico and there they had a better attitude toward death and passing on. Coincidentally Jenny's mother had lived in Mexico so they got to talking about Mexico and the Day of the Dead and all that and sort of hit it off, swimming next to each slowly in the empty pool with the dead guy lying there with his arm in the water and his leg slipping further in, getting deader. Then Jenny's mom said, "You know, he was never that nice to me and didn't say hello like he did to the other people, but he did swim every day so as a testament to his memory maybe we should keep swimming." So they kept going, a few more laps, in memory of the dead swimmer.

Photo by Jaimie Warren

NEW SEX TECHNIQUES

My friend and I were at a bar with *Blazing Saddles* playing on the TV above us. Right after I said, "Hey there's LaVar Burton," Cleavon Little mouthed, "Excuse me while I whip this out" and though we couldn't hear the words the bartender said them for us and laughed uproariously. This blond woman who I'd seen spooning (in the Welsh sense) with some guy and later stumbling with him to a car saying, "That looks like an Audi" was back inside and came over. "Hey, I know I know you. Where do you work?" When I said where, she wasn't satisfied. "Where do you hang out?" Still this didn't seem to please her and she got more demanding. "No, that's not it, I know I know you." Then she mentioned a bar right by my house where I went often, and she was triumphant. "That's it! I totally remember you. I used to bartend there." She was very happy to have figured out the mystery. Then she bought herself and us a shot of whiskey, telling the bartender that I was a good guy because I used to hang out at the bar where she used to work. She said she'd just taken a ride in an Audi with a guy she used to go out with who now wanted to get back together. "We had a nice long talk but we're just friends now," but then about a minute later she slipped in, "So I let him feel my tits in the car a bit, but I'm not into him anymore." We were like, wait, you just said you only had a long talk. "All right, we made out a bit. He's got a new Audi and kept saying how hot I looked and wouldn't I come home with him. But you know, we used to fool around two years ago, and tonight he was saying things like, 'You want to see my cock, don't you?' and I was just like, wait a second, you can't pull out these new moves with somebody you used to have sex with, it just doesn't work, all of a sudden he's talking all dirty but he never did that when we were together. You can't bust out these new sex techniques after all that time passed." My friend and I both laughed and said, "So, you didn't just have a long talk?" "OK, I gave him a blowjob. Big deal. I wanted to ride in the Audi, but I can't get involved with that, I'm looking for a husband. Are you married?" When I said maybe this bar wasn't the best place for finding a husband, she sighed and said all right it was good to see you and left.

JOCKO WEYLAND

Illustration by Milano Chow

Risa Mickenberg

Vice: How long have you been writing fiction?
Risa: *Always, but more in the last ten years.*
What's the best novel ever written and why?
Fuck everyone because it's The Corrections. *It's about everything going on in America now and it's ruthless but comic and deft and accessible and devastating and manages to be about so much within one family and is deeply and believably from each character's point of view. It's a perfect book.*
Who's the lamest famous novelist and why?
I don't read lame famous novels. There's too much good shit on the web.
Were your teen years like the life that you write about in your stories?
Yeah—a lot like that. I grew up in Connecticut. My world was a mix of Colonial and dirtball. GunneSax and GTOs. Ozzy meets Audubon Society. I love that world.

OUT BY HOLY LAND

I hate Stew but he sells weed. So one Saturday, me, Mike, and Mike's brother Ross drive Stew's fuck-friend Boudreau out to Stew's house to cop.

Boudreau sits up front which is fine with me except that I have to look at the back of her head with her blond hair feathering all the way back into gross split ends.

Mike and Ross are clearly all hopped up that she's in the car—she works with them at Mattatuck Manufacturing where they make brake cables and she's like the only woman there so when she walks across the floor at the factory, everyone just goes nuts, sticking their tongues through their peace-sign fingers. Stew cheats on his wife with her, which is one reason that I hate him. Also he acts like he's the shit, buying this huge new truck all on credit which Mike said they're going to have to repo.

Stew lives out by Holy Land, which I've driven past a million times but never been to and I always wondered about it. Holy Land is a hill with a big lit-up cross on it off of Exit 19 in Waterbury where some guy spent his life building a miniature Bethlehem. On the side of the hill it says in big letters: Holy Land U.S.A.

Turns out Holy Land is in a shitty neighborhood. Stew's house is a real dump with those little diamond-shaped windows in the front door and dirty plastic toys all over the yard and a weight bench and Stew's big red truck out front all wet and shiny from having just been washed.

His house smells like corn chips. Inside, there are about eight sectionals of a sofa that don't fit together. They're all blue and very padded and they take up the whole room.

Stew's wife is sitting on the sofa and she's rocking a baby and a cigarette. She's really skinny and mean-looking and poor. I don't know how else to describe it. You can't blame her for looking mean with Boudreau right there with one erect nipple busting out of her t-shirt and flirting with her fat thighs spreading as she opens and shuts her knees, all keyed up being around Stew.

Stew slips off to the kitchen with Boudreau to I'm sure grab her ass and they get us beers and we all sit down on those weird sectionals of sofa while Ross cleans a big bag of weed.

They're watching a Charles Bronson movie on the TV. *Death Wish II*.

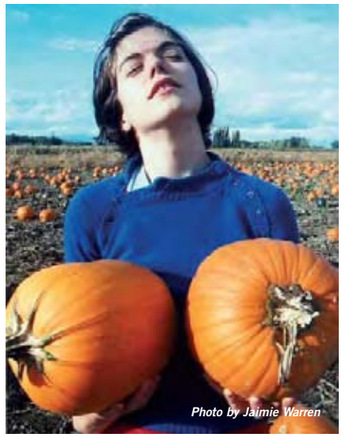


Photo by Jaimie Warren

In *Death Wish II*, these guys break into Charles Bronson's house. Charles Bronson's maid is home. She's like 50 or something and they rape her. Well, first they make her kneel down and face the bed. Then one guy pulls up her dress and pulls down her underwear and kisses her butt and she's crying and everything and then he rapes her—they all do—and the whole time they're all hooting and laughing and jumping around.

While this is on, Stew has rolled a fat one and, as he's passing it around, his other kid walks into the room. She's like five. Or four. She's young and she's dressed like a sticky little K-Mart princess. I smile at her and I feel really sorry for her. She can't stop staring at me. I imagine that she's thinking that maybe I'm some kind of good example for her.

I have never seen a Charles Bronson movie before. It's the most horrible thing I've ever seen. They kept the TV on, even though the little girl was standing there. They kept passing the joint and Boudreau is sitting right there and the mother is smoking and the rapists were raping the maid who's screaming and Stew's little girl is just standing there watching me.

I don't know what the fuck was wrong with me, but when Mike passed me the joint, I took a hit. I thought about not doing it but, in the end, I went ahead anyway.

Later on in the Charles Bronson movie, this lady said to one of the rapists who felt bad after what he did, "You dipped your wick just like the rest of them." Dipped your wick. It was so disgusting.

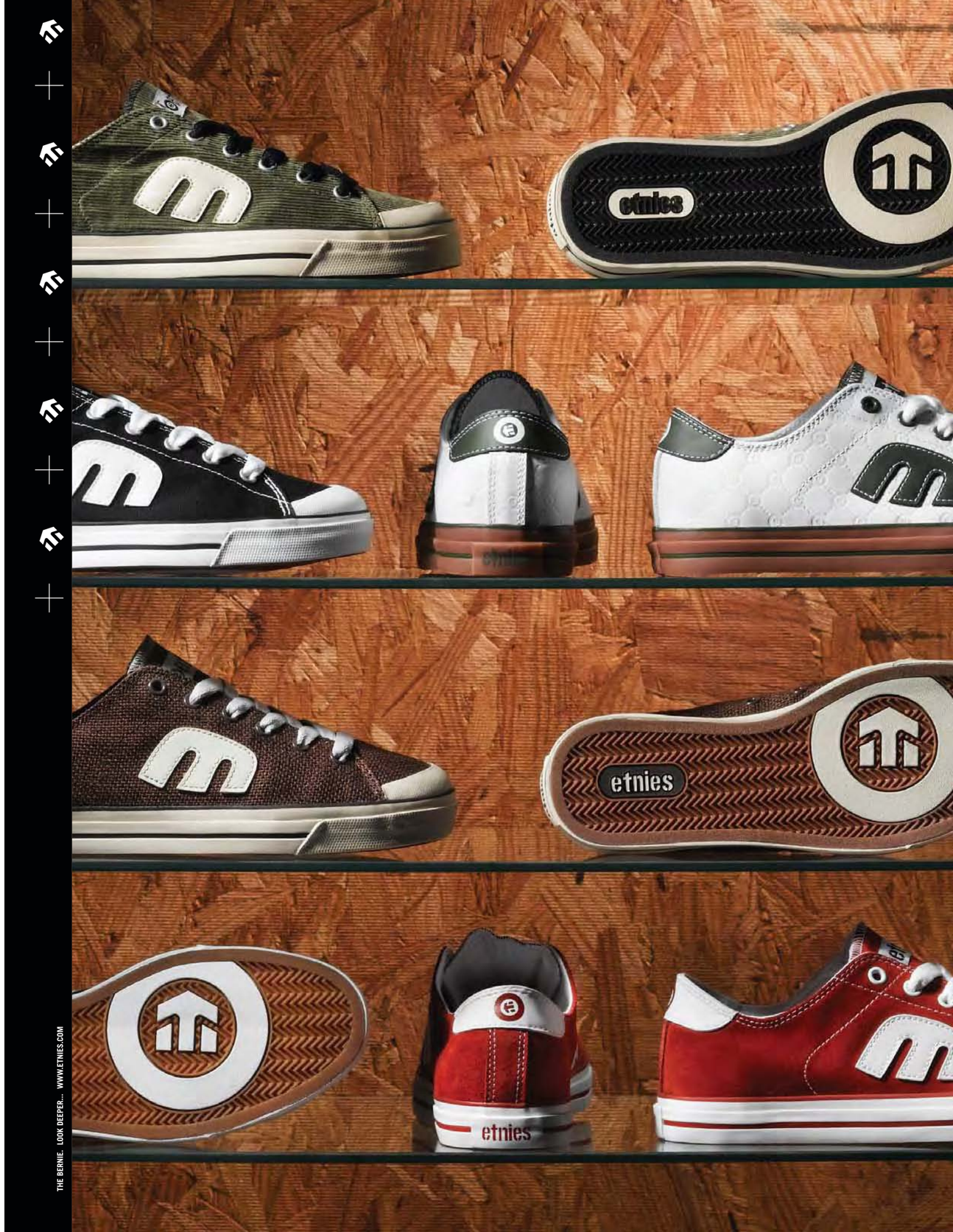
But I did just what the rest of them did.

I wanted to go to Holy Land when we left, but Ross had someplace else to be.

Years later, I finally did get out to Holy Land. The place was all abandoned and decrepit and spooky with stuff like the Ten Commandments cut out of bits of carpet and verse spelled out in those gold letters you buy at the hardware store for mailboxes. The miniature Bethlehem was rotting and covered with graffiti. I was walking around by myself and I heard a scream in the bushes that scared the shit out of me and this peacock walked out. It was like it was a dream. Like I was on the grounds of some sultan's palace.

RISA MICKENBERG

Illustration by Milano Chow



A CARTOON BY DAVID MAMET

Vice: So what's this, you're a comic now? What's the joke here?
Mamet [by email]: A new Passover tradition...

Hardee har. Seriously, do you think that is funny?
[No response.]

Mr. Mamet? I'm just seeing if you got the last email I sent. I'd asked if your comic is supposed to be ha-ha funny or just a smirker.
[No response.]

So what are you working on?
[No response.]

VICE STAFF

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"Hrump—not enough pride to build a Nest."

A CARTOON BY FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Flannery O'Connor's short stories are really funny, but no one ever talks about that. It might be because the jokes aren't haw-haw jokes, or it might be because the humor is so dark that a lot of people don't have the taste for it. She has this way of piling one beat-the-wall setup after another for a couple pages, and then exploding them in a moment of humiliation—or hubris or cruelty or whatever.

One example is in her story "Enoch and the Gorilla." Enoch is new to the city, and he's alone, carrying a broken umbrella with a dog-headed handle because he thinks it looks "distinguished." It starts raining buckets. Enoch takes shelter and sees that there is something going on at a theater, some commotion. He goes up and finds out kids are waiting to shake hands with a man in a gorilla suit, to promote a gorilla movie. Enoch worms his way into the line with the idea that he'll say something to the gorilla—something hurtful and funny that will get all the children's attention and amuse them. When he finally gets up to the gorilla, he extends his hand, and says, "Name of Enoch. Enoch Emory. Come from… etc." The man in the gorilla suit, still holding Enoch's hand, leans forward, close enough that Enoch can see his eyes, and he says, "You go to hell."

Flannery O'Connor made this cartoon while she was in college. She made hundreds of them, and they're all full of heavy sarcasm and stupid haw-haw jokes, but still, they have a faint suggestion of what's to come: A genius who is dying of lupus and remembering the people in the South, i.e., comedy gold.
VICE STAFF

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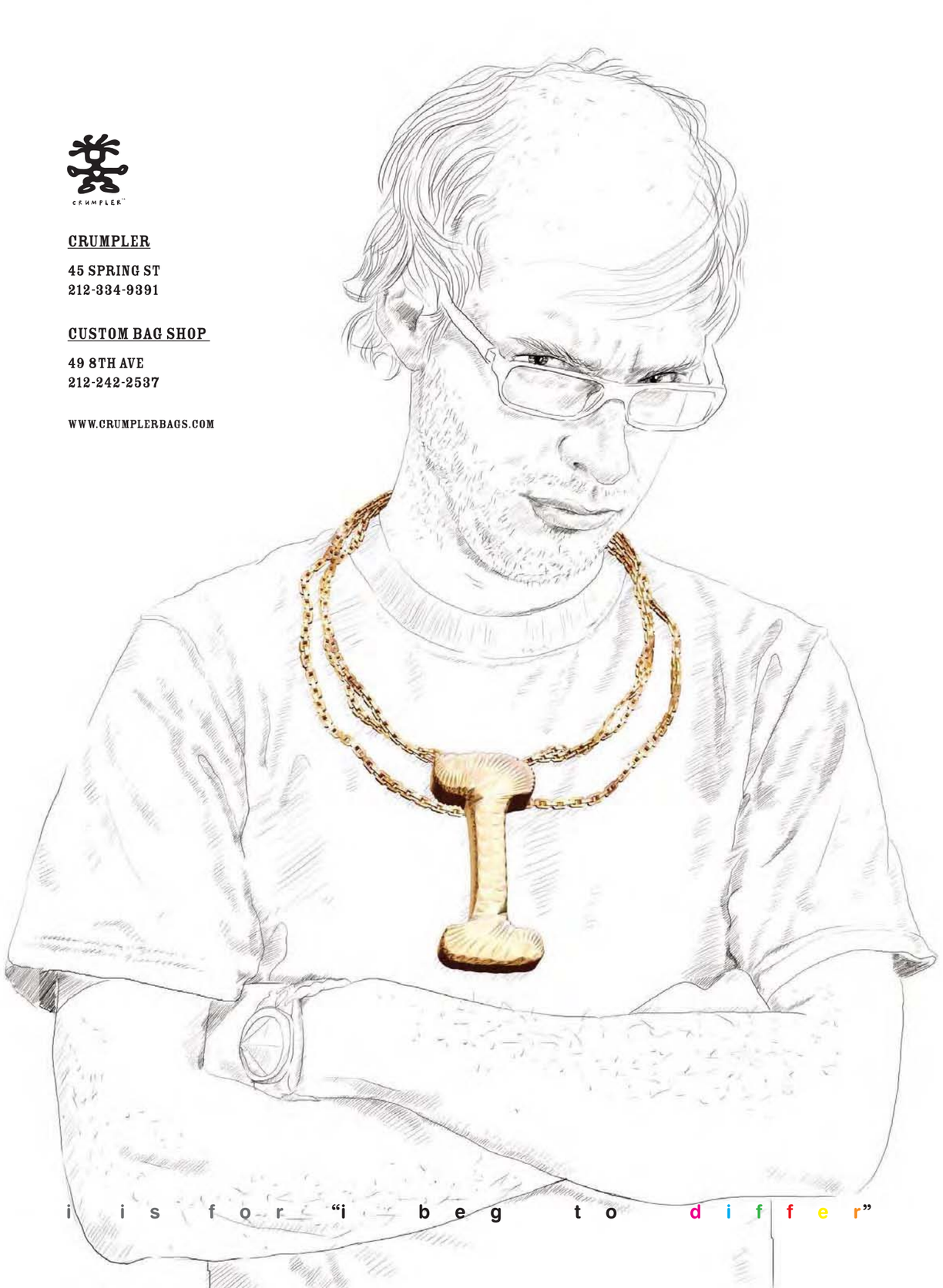


i is for "i beg to differ"

Illustration by Milano Chow

Chuck Palahniuk

Vice: When did you first write?

Chuck: *In fifth grade, because of praise from my teacher, Richard Olson, who still runs the library in the very small town of Burbank, Washington. That writing stint lasted until the ogreish Mr. Dorn in sixth grade. It wasn't until I bought a slum house in an area with no television or radio reception that I began writing again. To stimulate myself. No, that sounds dirty... How about: To "entertain" myself.*

What is your daily writing routine like?

Early in my day, I row or do something exhausting so I can sit still and write later. During my shower, I think of the day's plot problem and brainstorm ideas. All day, exercising or driving or whatever, I'm making notes of details I want to include in the day's work in a spiral-bound notebook. The final task is to sit and keyboard all the ideas together, then print a hard copy I can line edit the next day.

OK. We'll check back in with you after the story, Chuck.

MISTER ELEGANT

Don't ask how I know this, but the next time you think you're fat, there's a whole lot worse way you can look.

Something to picture, when you're at the gym counting stomach crunches or hanging knee raises to flatten your ab muscles, just know that some people have a whole other person growing out of that spot on their body. That fleshy, jiggly area under the bottom of your rib cage, where to you is just a "love handle," those other people have arms and legs, most of a whole other person hanging over their belt.

Doctors call this an "epigastric parasite."

Some social workers, they call that extra person a "heteradelphian," a fancy word for "different sibling." It means somebody who should've been your brother or sister only got born with their head still inside your stomach. That extra person, he's born with no brain. No heart. He's just a parasite, and you're the host.

You couldn't make this stuff up.

And, please, listen. If I'm telling you this and you do have another person growing out from underneath your arm right now, please don't get all bent out of shape.

The only reason I'm telling you is I kind of used to have one, too.

And trust me, what's worlds worse than some jiggling subcutaneous fat is you popping out some heartless, brainless stranger. Sometimes that happens even years and years after you're already born.

Don't ask how I know this either, but after you've done a hundred million stomach crunches, when you apply to be one of those Chippendales-type sexy dancers—just to get hired as a buff, naked exotic dancer—they ask you: "… do you suffer from epileptic seizures?"

The question's on the form they give you at the doctor's office for the physical exam right after your audition. The nurse hands you a clipboard full of forms and a pen and a Dixie cup she wants filled with piss. And the dance company, it's not even the real Chippendales, but you ask any has-been, washed-up male exotic dancer what troupe he was with, and just to shortcut a lot of explaining, he'll tell you Chippendales.

We all recognize those copyrighted white paper cuffs and the black bow tie.

Really, my audition was for the Savage Knights. That's "Knights" with a capital K. The Savage Knights are your Chippendales type of all-male, high-energy, feel-good touring exotic-dance company that caters to a ladies' audience. Their home office ran this ad in the newspaper for auditions. In the sports section, across the top, their ad said: "Live Your Fantasy."

In the banquet room of the airport Holiday Inn, on that Sunday afternoon, my smile on my face was a lie. My tan was a lie. So was my hair being blonde. On the job application, when I wrote 185 pounds, that was a lie. Under eye color, I wrote the color of my contact lenses. During the sit-down part of the interview, I said I wanted to be a Savage Knight because I really liked to travel to interesting places and meet new people.

The truth was, really I just wanted a career where every night, hundreds of drunk young virgins, they would stuff cash money into my underpants with their teeth.

For my age, I lied away three years and wrote down 24.

Every one of my capped teeth, it was a shiny white lie.

I buzzed off my brown pubic hair, and the agent for Savage Knights said they had an opening for another Mister Elegant. At any moment, she told me, 16 different companies of Savage Knights are crisscrossing the world, meeting the male stripper needs of global billions. Each troupe includes a fireman, a police officer, a soldier, a construction worker in a yellow hardhat. Like a roving high school Career Day. Plus Mister Elegant, who makes his entrance in a breakaway tuxedo and gives roses to all the women at the ringside tables. All smooth and cosmopolitan. A cool James Bond.

Troupe 11, their last Mister Elegant had turned gun-shy and bailed after some coked-up birthday girl in Fairbanks yanked him a torsioned testicle.

That's when my own parasite started coming out.

In that Holiday Inn ballroom, I looked like nothing I'd ever seen in my bathroom mirror. Tanned and baby-oiled. Blond and smiling.

And the agent shook my oily hand, saying, "Good." She said, "From now on, you'll be Mister Elegant…"

The emergence of my new heartless, brainless different sibling.

Life is nothing if not a slippery slope.

What was true was, I figured if I made a relentless and ongoing effort I could pass for 24, forever.

For my dance part of my audition, the song "Bodyrock" by the artist Moby gives you your best 3:36 grabber. Call my taste a little retro, but you start with a song folks like and you've halfway won the game. Plus the dropout toward the end, when the track cuts to just lyrics, that gives you your perfect window to nail some stunt work. Inside that frame, I pegged a standing flip, dropped to splits, and recovered with a kip-up. After all my tanning and shaving and smiling, the agent for Savage Knights, she gave me a sheet of paper printed with directions to a clinic. The nurse gave me a cup for piss. And the forms asked:

"Do you have a history of epileptic seizures?"

So after all that bullshit, it was easy to check the little box marked NO.

I just made sure and took my Clonazepam.

If you've seen the video people uploaded on the Internet, of the naked muscleman flopping like a fish, surrounded by women holding Rum Hurricanes and Blue Hawaiis, his pink balls popped out one side of his black

This was taken at one of Manhattan's top-notch, massively depressing male strip joints.

G-string and slapping in a puddle of his own piss, then you know what kind of mistake that last lie turned out to be.

Everybody in the world's seen that video.

Little bastard teenage kids, now they even do a dance they call the Mister Elegant where they keel over in the middle of the dance floor and wiggle like hyperactive spastics being electrified. Little shitheads.

People imagine it's so easy to be a Chippendales-type, high-energy exotic dancer. Male people, they imagine your worst problem is not sprouting a woodie.

Some other questions on that same medical examination form, they ask you: "Do you suffer from stress-related incontinence?"

And, "Have you ever had an episode of narcolepsy?"

Just from those questions, I should've seen where this was headed. Lawyers don't just pull those questions out of a hat. Any big dance company from your Bolshoi Ballet to Chippendales, they've mapped out their doomsday scenario. Maybe smack in the middle of *Swan Lake*, some swan pitching a fit center stage, her eyes rolled up to only show the whites, drool gushering out from her long, yellow beak. Sweating. Pissing her lovely white feathers.

In the Savage Knights training brochure, they teach you to watch for anybody in the audience with a pad and pencil taking notes. Some deal called ASCAP—stands for American Society of Composers and Something-Something—if they catch you dancing to a song and not paying a royalty, they'll sue you and Savage Knights. Besides them, every state sends liquor-commission spies to fine you for touching a patron inappropriately. Even just wearing white paper cuffs and a black bow tie, you risk a cease-and-desist letter from the real Chippendales for copyright infringement.

Don't even ask me about managing body hair.

Really, the worst part of this job is paying to buy people a new Tequila Sunrise after you boogie off a pubic hair. Just a single good hip check can mean you buying the front two rows a fresh round of banana daiquiris.

Every bit of your free time, you spend pickling your balls and managing body hair.

Live Your Fantasy… Again, you couldn't make this stuff up.

Getting a drunk anybody to put money in your pants with their teeth, it's worlds harder than it sounds. So is staying 24 years old.

One minute you're shaking your bag in the face of some bachelorette so shitfaced on Long Island Iced Teas you can smell your pube stubble curl from her lit cigarette. Her ugly bridesmaid is sticking a dollar bill up your ass with her tongue, and her mother's shooting video. That's how drunk virgins behave. Police officers or firemen—I mean real ones—they complain about job stress. They don't know real stress. Dancers I worked with, they used to soak their bag in salt water, the way a boxer will pickle his face to tough it up before a big fight. Every bit of your free time, you spend pickling your balls and managing body hair.

The only other most important part of job training is telling time by songs.

David Bowie's "I'm Afraid of Americans," that gives you an exact five minutes of fuzzed power chords.

Keith Sweat's "One on One" is a slow grind song (5:01) perfect for choreographing an elephant. By that, I mean any dancer too bulked up to move except for hitting competition poses. Step, flex, step. The Double Bicep. The Crab.

How you keep from getting a hard-on is you're counting all the time to anticipate the end of each song. You name a song, and I can peg the time—and not just the minutes and seconds listed on the jewel box liner. I can tell you the actual time that shows on the deck in the booth. A good dancer knows the Digweed remix of Bryan Ferry's "Slave to Love," the liner says four minutes, 31 seconds, but in actuality it's 24 seconds. A lazy dancer will find himself still waist-deep in drunk women when the music stops.

You shaking your junk to a pounding mix of Underworld's "Mo Move"—a relentless bass heartbeat for six minutes and 52 seconds—that's artistic. But if you don't make it backstage by when the music stops, even in just one moment of silence, you shaking your shaved parts at strange ladies—that's just harassment.

Again, another slippery slope. And do not

ask me how I know.

Silence. Silence and the closing lights coming on, bright, that's Cinderella turning into a grinning, naked, greasy, and sweaty guy with his penis too close to your face and your watery $10 White Russian.

As outlined in the Savage Knights training brochure, Mister Elegant makes his entrance, handing out roses to the front tables. He dances the Joey Negro Club Mix of Raven Maize doing "Fascinated." A three minute, 42-second grabber song. Then he moves to the edge of the stage and dances one shorter high-energy song to bait out the folding money. He works the edge and the floor, humping laps and taking tips, and he's off-stage just one beat before the Police Officer's grabber song.

The next night in Spokane, same deal. Then Wenatchee. Pendleton. Boise.

A job so simple even a brainless, heartless parasite can do it.

Mister Elegant loved the dollar tips and the phone numbers. Phone numbers written on dollars. Phone numbers on scraps of paper towel, looped under the elastic leg straps of his black G-string.

All the way up until Salt Lake City.

Don't ask how I know this, but there's people with Milroy disease, where their lymph nodes in their legs never develop and they end up with feet the size of suitcases on legs like tree trunks. Or cyclopia, where you're born with no nose and both eyes in the same socket.

Mister Elegant, his nipples looked too small and pale pink so to make them swell, big and red, he learned to paint them with something called Lip Plumper. Comes in a bottle with a little brush, like nail polish, and when you paint it on your nipples and lips and the head of your dick, they all swell up, huge.

Mister Elegant outlined his washboard abdominal muscles by drawing between them with mascara, then blending with a wad of tissue so his belly wouldn't look like tic-tac-toe.

If he popped out one blue contact lens and looked at himself in the steamy mirror of a motel bathroom, yeah, he could still pass as 24. But between Billings and Great Falls and Ashland and Bellingham, between the Fireman's giving everyone crab lice and the Army Soldier's snoring, Mister Elegant was feeling wore out.

By Salt Lake City, his pickled balls were dragging.

Mister Elegant strutted out with his armful of red roses. Still in his breakaway tux, he gave out the roses, then started into the buttons on his pleated shirt. The only thing that makes Salt Lake City any different from Carson City or Reno or Sacramento is after the tux broke away, after Mister Elegant was counting into his second song, smiling and keeping his pubic hair out of people's drinks, watching the dollar bills come out of purses and pocket books, the virgins writing their phone numbers on old bank-machine receipts, between his dropping to full splits and bouncing back in a perfect kip-up, one deep breath before his handspring and a full midair flip, two minutes and 36 seconds into the N-Trance cover of "Staying Alive"—(4:02)—the faces and drinks and dollar bills started to blur. Mister Elegant thumbed up the elastic loop around each hip, high and tight for his handspring, crouched down, jumped—and that's all I remember.

In case you didn't notice, the music's stopped and here I am still shaking my dick in your face.

Like after all this time I didn't learn any better.

What a retard.

Early as I can remember, I used to have Simple Stare Syndrome, a form of temporal-lobe epilepsy. My mom or dad would be talking to me, and I'd freeze. My vision would blur and all my muscles would stop. I'd still hear my mom talking, telling me to pay attention, maybe snapping her fingers in my face, but I couldn't talk or move. Breathing is all I could do for a half minute, which seems like forever.

They took me in for MRIs and EKGs. I couldn't ride my bicycle except on deserted streets. I climbed trees and my vision would start to blur. I'd wake up on the ground, my friends asking if I was OK. One school play, the baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, six shepherds, three camels, an angel, and two other kings waited what felt like a year while I stood frozen with a gift of frankincense, Mrs. Rogers leaning out from the wings, whispering, "Bless me, for I bring you this humble offering… I bring this!"

A social worker came and sat next to my hospital bed, saying how the human mind is nothing if not a constant cycle of electrical activity.

But after ten years of Clonazepam, I pretty much had that licked.

Trouble was my prescription ran out in Carson City. Being tired makes it worse. Drinking and cigarette smoke, fatigue, loud noise, all risk factors.

In Salt Lake City, I'd pitched what's called a tonic-clonic seizure, what people used to call a grand mal seizure. I woke up in the back of a screaming ambulance, just in time to see a med tech stuff a thick stack of piss-soaked singles into his wallet, saying, "Mister Elegant…" and shaking his head. A blanket wrapped with belts held me flat, and I could smell shit. I asked the med tech, What happened? And he stuffed his wallet in his back pocket, saying, "Buddy, you don't want to know…"

By the time the hospital released me, Troupe 11 was already in Provo with a new Mister Elegant shipped out to meet them at the venue. The Motel 6 where we'd stayed the night before, they were holding my suitcase.

A social worker came and sat next to my hospital bed, saying how the human mind is nothing if not a constant cycle of electrical activity. She said a seizure is like a burst of static, a storm inside your head.

I said, Tell me something I don't know, lady.

And she told me about phocomelia, a condition where you're born with your hands emerging from your shoulders. No arms. The old-time term for this birth defect was in fact "seal arms." It's linked with the sedative Thalidomide, but it's existed long before that.

She told me about sirenomelia, where you're born with your legs fused together, to make what looks like a fish tail. Hence the name: Sirenomelia, and possibly the original idea of mermaids.

This social worker, she told me her name was Clovis, and she herself had been a dancer, an exotic dancer, trying to hide the fact she suffered from narcolepsy. She used to have long blond hair and blue eyes, long smooth legs and no tan lines. Next to my bed, her hair was curly and brown. Her eyes were brown, and the thighs of her white pantsuit looked too tight for her to cross her legs at the knee.

While dancing, she kept her condition under control with Provigil except she ran out and started skipping doses, breaking pills in half, your standard false economies. One night headlining in a biker bar in Rufus, New Mexico, Clovis made her big entrance, hit the brass pole high up and spinning from centrifugal force, her blond hair swinging, her tanned body spiraling toward the stage below.

Saying this, her brown eyes mist over.

Clovis can't recall ever sliding to the bottom of that pole. She woke up backstage and pregnant by some 32 customers. Some twice.

I ask her, What song?

And misty-eyed, Clovis says, "Portishead doing 'Sour Times'."

Ah, I agree. The sweet dark vocals of Beth Gibbons. Four minutes and 11 seconds.

"Four minutes and eight seconds," Clovis says. One eyebrow arched at me, she says, "Always check your deck time. Never trust liner notes."

I ask, What was her stage name?

And Clovis looked at her wristwatch, saying, "That was a long time ago." She says, "I'm almost 30."

Me too, I say.

And looking at some hospital form on her clipboard, Clovis says, "I kind of figured this age they put here was a lie."

Before she could stand up and walk away, I asked Clovis to tell me what happened. What really went on.

The baby was born, she said, nine months after she woke up, a textbook delivery. A boy. It didn't look like anybody and immediately drove off in a limousine to live a gated

lifestyle in the Malibu Colony with two gay millionaire movie-studio executives.

"Talk about popping out a brainless, heartless stranger," Clovis says.

She'd already told me about epigastric parasites.

And I said, No. I asked her, What happened to me?

And for a long minute of balls-out silence, Clovis just blinked her eyes at me. Finally, in the voice of a health-care professional, she said, "There's a videotape of the… event."

Some bachelorette had smuggled a pocket camcorder into the nightclub and was filming me as I handed out long-stemmed red roses. I launched into my set, and she'd kept filming. They had to digitally fuzz the part where my nuts popped out, but the video had been aired on television. First just a Japanese funny-home-video program, but then in Europe. On the internet, the four-minute, 21-second segment went viral, downloaded worldwide. The stuff of jokes on every late-night talk show.

ASCAP was suing websites and search engines over the unauthorized distribution of "Staying Alive." The Chippendales syndicate wasn't thrilled I had on white paper cuffs. Someone claiming to be a producer from the *Late Show* called the hospital switchboard, asking to be connected with my bedside.

I told Clovis, I wanted to see for myself.

And Clovis said, "No." She said, "You don't."

I asked, How bad could it be?

And Clovis said, "During the episode, you lost momentary control of your bowels."

The smell in the ambulance.

"A G-string," Clovis said, "doesn't leave much room for error."

I never did watch that video.

Utah was a good enough place to hide, so I stayed in Salt Lake City and let my pubic hair grow back. I dyed my blond hair brown. I scrubbed off my suntan, and ate all the food—fried chicken and Hostess fruit pies and barbecue potato chips—that Mister Elegant could never eat.

By the time you turn 30, your life is about escaping the person you've become in order to escape the person you've become in order to escape the person you started. So for a while there, I was becoming Mister Fat-Gutted-Pale-Bitter-Pig. I worked a fast-food job, and every few million cheeseburgers some customer would stare at me across the greasy counter, their eyes working fast to figure out where they knew my face.

And I'd snap my fingers, asking, "You want fries with that?"

I never took a single from anybody without washing my hands.

Maybe if I'd been wallowing in my own feces, maybe people would put two and two together, but then all those Chinese died on security videotape in that really goofy department-store fire and the comedy world forgot all about me and my messy disaster.

But Clovis didn't. And I couldn't.

Clovis came to have lunch, cheeseburgers, bringing along a young client whose fingers were fused into two fleshy pincers and whose legs were withered and useless. Ectrodactyly syndrome, what people used to call "lobster claw syndrome." She introduced me to a young woman with pygomelia, which means she had four legs, basically two pelvises side-by-side and four functioning legs, which she hid under long skirts.

Me, I still told time by songs. Joe Jackson's "Steppin' Out" is four minutes and 19 seconds, time enough to smoke a cigarette in the alley. Kim Wilde singing "You Keep Me Hanging On," that's four minutes and 15 seconds, the time it takes me to change the carbonated gas cylinder for the soda machine.

By the time you turn 30, your life is about escaping the person you've become in order to escape the person you've become in order to escape the person you started.

Everything you want to forget, you never can. Every moment you want to escape.

At last, Clovis asks me back to her apartment to meet some people. I tell her my day is nothing if not meeting people. And Clovis says this is different.

At her apartment, she's introducing me to a girl with two arms and legs, almost a whole other person sprouting from under the bottom hem of her tube top. My first real heteradelphian, her name is Mindy. Next, I meet a kid with a face huge and lumpy as a bed pillow. Neurofibromatosis, the Elephant Man disease. He's 23 and his name is Alex. I meet a cute redhead with no legs and only her feet growing out of her stomach, osteogenesis imperfecta. Her name is Gwen, and she's 25.

Clovis says to me, "You know music. You know the staging." She says, "It's their idea, but they hoped you could teach them exotic dancing…"

She meant stripping. A troupe of differently-abled exotic dancers. They were all young and bored with Salt Lake City. Their thinking was: Anyone can bulk up some muscle, bleach their hair, and spray on a fake tan. Why not offer an audience something that wasn't based on a pile of lies? Why not serve up dancers not hiding behind fake smiles?

The bunch of crazy, idealistic kids. Only in Utah.

I tell them, Sure they're young and full of dreams. Sure, they're monstrously deformed. But can they dance…?

And Clovis says, "I've taught them what I know about working a pole, but I was hoping…"

The millionaire studio executives had fronted seven figures in low-interest start-up financing.

Hell, if I can teach some of those steroid elephants to dance, I can teach anybody.

Like it says in the newspaper: Live Your Fantasy.

I wish I could say it's been easy. People will always misunderstand your intentions. People accuse me of exploitation. That, and no small business is all beer and Skittles. In Boulder, Glenda, our girl with both eyes in one socket, she eloped with a stockbroker millionaire. In Iowa City, Kevin, our dancer with parastremmatic dwarfism, he knocked up some bachelorette. It helps that Clovis tours with me and the troupe, as a kind of den mother. God only knows what we'll do come September, when we launch our new escort service.

Me, personally, not a show starts without me sweating in the wings. Counting the seconds of every song. Watching for ASCAP people taking notes, and every muscle in my legs and arms twitching, reliving every handspring, cartwheel, midair flip, and kip-up I ever nailed on stage. Watching those crazy kids bait the folding money and lap dance for the tips, I catch myself still whispering.

Whispering, "Bless me, for I bring you this humble offering…"

Whispering, "I bring this!"

CHUCK PALAHNIUK

Have you been interested in weird medical conditions for a long time?

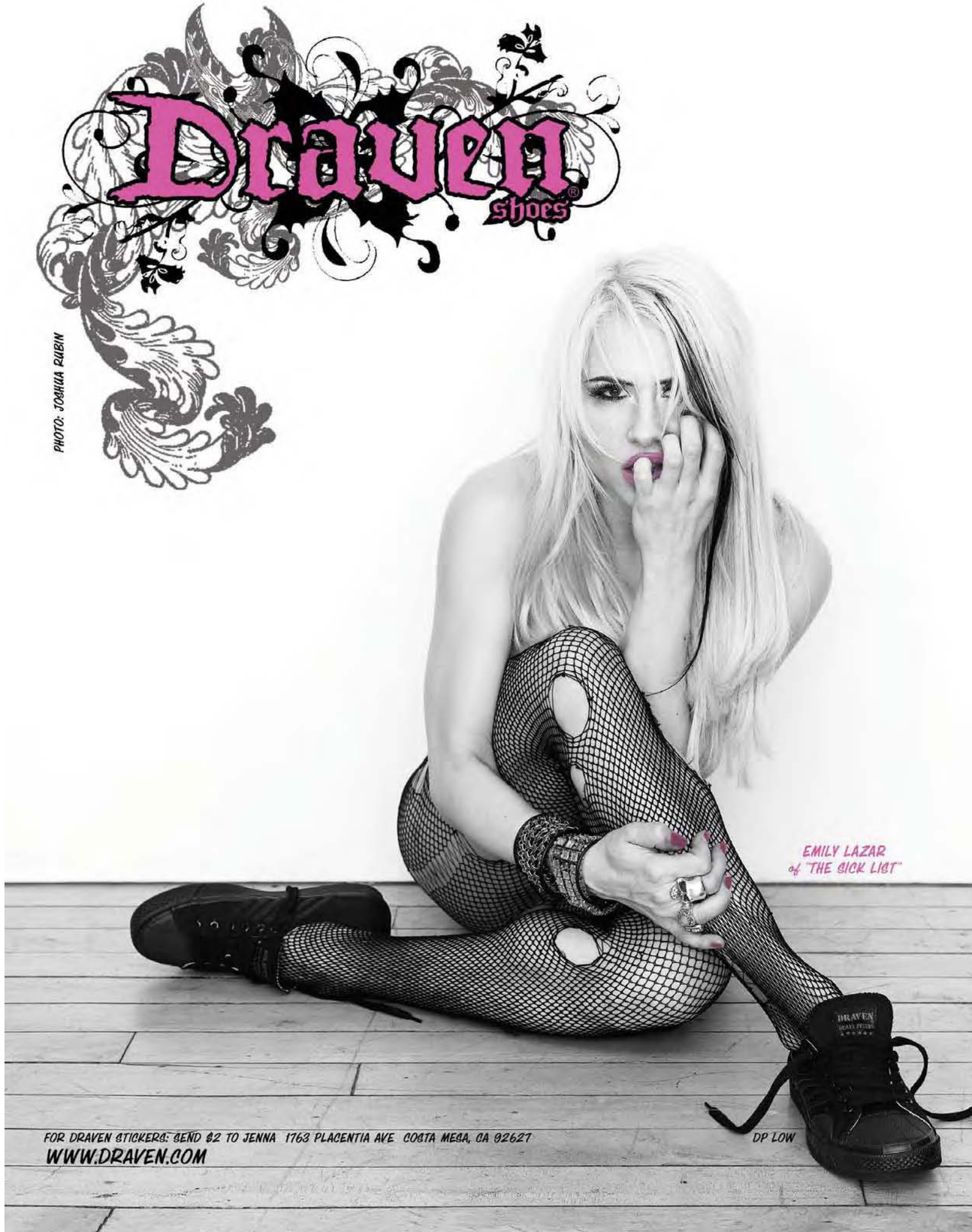
My goal is always to enroll the reader on a physical level as well as an emotional and intellectual level. The best way to get a sympathetic physical response is to write about violence, sex, accidents, drugs, or illness.

Does Mister Elegant really go into this thinking the life of a stripper's going to be glamorous and sexy?

Of course. I did. Every exotic dancer does.

***What's the connection between vanity and heartlessness? Answer us* that.**

I'll take a wild guess... A lack of empathy? A complete obsession with receiving love without giving it? A selfishness? How about, both words have an A in them?



Andrea Dworkin

Vice: This story feels really autobiographical.

John Stoltenberg (Dworkin's widower): *Andrea was married in Amsterdam to a Dutch radical and anarchist who began to beat her horribly, and she made her escape from that almost literally with just the coat on her back. She managed to come back to the United States and bring her two dogs. One of them was named Velvet and one of them was named Gringo. Somehow, Andrea got these dogs shipped to the United States and picked them up, and because she had almost no money, she was not able to support both dogs. She gave up Velvet for adoption. It was one of the great remorses of Andrea's life. It haunted her that she wasn't able to take care of that dog. I think that she began writing this novel to work through that experience of abandoning a dog with whom she clearly identified—not least because they shared that brutal environment of this sadistic man.*

From VELVET

I'm Half Dead

I'm half dead from grief because I turned into trash. There was the day I hit my dog. I changed sides. I went to the killer side even though I was fraught with fear. I was garbage inside. I had become trash. What could I do if I couldn't touch her without making her bleed. He had contaminated me, I was poisoned inside, I was closer to death with maggots on me. I never believed I could do it and yet there I was, her desperate eyes half-shaded, looking at me, the devil. I shaked. I couldn't stop trembling. I was some kind of poison tree. I never had been so close to suicide because hitting her was slandering every part of me. I don't know how the men do it over and over again. I did it over and over again. She was so afraid of me and she loved me. The worst was that she loved me. I went down by the river. I took her with me. We sat and watched the water move without moving.

She was small for her breed. When she sat, her interior side made half of a circle, the underbelly a gray and white color, vulnerable, exposed. Then as her body went to the top she got darker and her edge made a line against the sky. If she breathed heavy the edge moved, pumped up and down, moved as if it were a small mountain straining against the sky. She was a world, a simple line drawing that made a universe as if there were nothing else. There could be things everywhere, grass swaying in the wind, rain pouring down, hills stubborn and stationary, cans and bullets and men, several men, and still she was everything and everyone. There could be a landscape that had brushstrokes, tiny, wild, and she was the unity, the act of grace, the beauty. No one knows enough about how any of them bring to earth the sublime but with her there was no point guessing. She was one of the great artists before modernity, a desperate affirmation.

She was small for her breed. She had a circle at her center. There was an empty round space in her middle. It was tender, it was simple, it was empty, and then her body pushed up to the top, an edge, a line, against the sky, against the mountain or hill or landscape, a flat landscape filled with color, and she sat. She sat. Her head moved not at all. Her head had dignity, beauty, and a profile that did not show age so much as time. She sat still.

She was small, not dainty but elegant, a head made of something like crystal or clay though it was flesh and blood. Her eyes were sad because I had turned on her and hurt her. Her eyes were brown with a green tint and they were filled with sorrow. She was young but grief aged her. I can't remember when it started except for the fact that it did start; he hit me, I hit her, except that it can't be that simple. I was afraid of him, that he would come back and there would be shit on the floor or some other egregious error she did but I'd be blamed and his fist would get me. There is no reason. What I remember is that I pounded her and her body collapsed inward and her eyes looked up and around as if trying to see what had gone wrong in the world, what hideous thing I had done or why, where the pain came from, why the day smashed open, why. I had the same reaction to him, why. But for me it was worse because I knew better, someone hurt me and I knew it was a calamity. There's no reason except I had reached the point that I was ready to die because I couldn't stand it anymore and maybe she couldn't either, I think she couldn't. I didn't have her grace or beauty. I was just someone, a person, trembling, afraid. I'd put on clothes to cover my bruises, I'd hide the marks he made on me, I was just a fucking awful human being, not someone important or special, not someone who stood out or up. There was nothing good about me. I crawled around the floor when he'd chase me, a newspaper or belt in hand. I was just someone, in human terms no one. She had a whole world surrounding her body as if it were the backdrop. She existed and everything else was background. I never wanted to be important. I didn't deserve attention, even his attention. I was quiet and I was without any special qualities. She on the other hand had a dignity that included purpose and quietude. When the men wrote about existentialism they meant her and her way of living, I'm sure of it. I had a feeling of being garbage and nothing, not the sun or moon, could erase it or make it less desperate. I wormed around, never knowing what I could do. I was a stupid kind of person, no one. I was passionless and had a lack of what some ladies call self-esteem, but what is that? I want to go into a shack and live there until I died and no one could convince me otherwise because there's hair and eyes and you use them on men and all the other body parts but it's garbage really, to think that you can get one or have one, a personality or a talent, it's easier to be one, someone's piece. When I hit her I wanted the floor to open up and grab me inside it and I think that's fair or as fair as anything could be. I was grapes tread on or something else tread on and it had nothing to do with don't tread on me, I just was stepped on all over but the tragedy was her because the life was in her. I've never loved anyone so much. I took her with me when I ran away and no one ever tried so hard to make her be safe but she wasn't safe from me and so how could it be that she had any place? I'm in love I would think but how can I love this thing, she's a thing even more than I am but it's not true because I'm a thing even more than she is. I would have given her my heart, my soul, all my money, all my things, I didn't have much but it was all hers. Let them say what they want but I'm desperate for the love of her, of her. The girls would say I loved a dog as if that's something dirty but I never touched her in a bad way except when I was corrupt enough to hit her, in which case my love for her meant nothing.

She was small for her breed, which is why he had contempt for her but I didn't have contempt for her so why would I hurt her? There's pit bulls and other ugly, mean dogs

Continued on pg. 114

Illustration by Milano Chow

RACONTEUR IS FRENCH FOR STORYTELLER. THE FRENCH MUST TELL REALLY LOUD STORIES.

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Neil LaBute

Vice: This story is written from a pretty reprehensible point of view: A racist guy in an office who is obsessed with his black coworker. It's harsh.
Neil: *Yeah, it's interesting. This kind of thing really grows out of the moment for me as a writer.*
So it didn't grow out of a long-standing idea?
No. Writing things like this is almost an experiment for me.
Was there a point when you were writing it and you just said, "Hmm. This is too much"?
For me, there is no "too much." I want to provoke an audience, but only in the best sense.
You mean that you want them to think about things.
Yes, and that audience includes me, you, and the readers. I want to get people to respond to this kind of thing. Ever since In the Company of Men, *I've been interested in office politics and power dynamics. This is a take on all of that.*

SLAVE TO THE OFFICE

I've been shitting in L'Tesha Jackson's desk drawer for months now and I see no reason to stop. I really don't. See, the thing of it is, it started as this little prank, a sort of dare that a buddy of mine put me up to and that was that. A one-time deal. I stayed late one night at work—no big thing, very normal, lots of folks do with the sliding deadlines that they've got us on (we might as well be chained to our desks, practically)—and I played around on my computer, did a little filing, made a Cup-a-Soup in the microwave, etc., all while keeping an eye on everybody else as the ranks were slowly thinning out (this was a Friday, which made sense what with the weekend coming up). By ten that night, the place was a graveyard. I'd been alone for a good hour or more and the moon was shining in through the big windows that face the park across the street. It was a beautiful evening, from the looks of it. I made one last check of the back cubicles and all of the restrooms—there are two sets on our floor—and then moved quickly over to her desk. She had one near the window which hardly seemed right since she was fairly new; a "must hire" friend of somebody from upstairs and she'd settled into a recently vacated spot that most of us had had our eyes on. Pretty soon it was covered in pictures of her two kids—she's a "single mom," big surprise—movie-magazine photos of the Denzel Washington/Will Smith/Jamie Foxx variety and all kinds of other crap that would make your head spin if you saw it. Even a few of those Kwanzaa cards (I'm not kidding!) that are the gaudiest colors and some half-deflated balloons from a birthday party that we were compelled to throw for her—she shares a birthday with Diana Ross she was quick to inform us. Also Leonard Nimoy and the poet Robert Frost—I made a quick check online—but they received no mention from her, which did not surprise me one little bit. Anyway, it was a beautiful night, the evening of the first assault; I moved briskly across the room, unbuckling my Kenneth Cole belt and dropping my trousers as I approached her area. I then opened her top drawer where she kept all her pens and pencils—right next to her "Big Brothers/Big Sisters" eraser—and let my ass hang down over the lip of the wood. I made sure it landed—the shit, I'm saying—all over her new ruler and her paperclips and then shut the drawer behind me. The pileup of feces was pretty substantial and it just barely cleared but with a little coaxing everything was back to normal (as it were) when I finished the deed. Five seconds after, I gathered myself up and shuffled off toward the men's room to give myself a good wiping, trying to not let the edge of my shirt touch my backside. It was as easy as that and I was home watching CNN about 40 minutes later.

Well, obviously it didn't stop there. I would've ended it then, I promise you I would—the whole thing began only because she took a parking spot that my friend on security liked for this old '74 Nova that he drove but she wouldn't hear of it as they had assigned that spot to her when she was hired and it was near the elevators so that was that. To be fair, the guy even offered her some cash for it but she made a whole big deal out of it, screeching at the top of her lungs to his supervisor that he better "back off" and "get up outta her face." After that, when he—Gary's his name, by the way, "Gary"—had covered himself with one of those "airtight" alibis that they love to talk about on the television cop shows, Gary asked me to do him a little favor and take a dump in her desk to teach her a lesson. I'd already lost out on the window seat so it didn't take much—two beers at the bar around the corner—for me to say "OK" and start planning the job. Afterwards, on that Monday that we returned to work, it was just, well, pretty unbelievable the way she went off. Yes, true, she had a mound of crap in her drawer but you would've thought she was there on some African beach, screaming at Spanish slavers as they were taking her sons and daughters away, never to see them again. First, it's always the discovery—which was amazing, quite frankly—and her falling back out of her chair and screaming at the top of her lungs (have you ever heard a black woman scream?), all while she was retching and hobbling around in her high heels, going down to one knee, pointing at the desk and tears pouring out. My God, it was quite a show. Of course I joined in on the whole patting her on the back and shaking my head of it all, covering my tracks with each hug and offer to clean it up for her. I did, in fact. Scooped the whole drawer out of the desk and carried it off toward the basement of the building. Entire thing had to take at least three hours out of the day—which didn't suck—and we had to individually go talk to our supervisor as we retraced our steps of the previous workday (the Friday past) for her. She's this big, old, nosy woman that's been working there for, like, 50 years or some crazy number and I could care less what she thinks but I was perfectly nice and made up a few lies and was back at my desk with plenty of time to say "good-bye" to everybody and head on home. L'Tesha had to leave at noon, of course, unable to stomach what had happened to her and feeling faint. And she didn't even have to take a personal day, either, as the folks up in Administration were no doubt preparing themselves for a lawsuit (which she has never done to this day, which I must give her proper credit for). If the company had offered to settle in "food stamps" it probably would've been a different story—I'm just kidding, I made that joke to a friend of mine from an office downstairs and we laughed about it over lunch one time—but it has not, as of yet, come down to any kind of legal situation. And that may be why I keep doing it. Shitting in her desk, I mean.

Now it's become more of a habit than anything; I'm serious when I say that, because

Illustration by Milano Chow

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Photo by Ben Ritter

I'm not even really into it anymore. Sure, it's funny when she stumbles on to one—she has moved to four different areas (I'm happy to mention that the coveted window station was taken over by yours truly) but L'Tesha continues to be plagued by this recurring event. I honestly believe that she's convinced herself that there's some kind of voodoo going on (you know how those people can be) and she had a family member—older woman with wild hair and these honey-colored eyes—come in and do some sort of religious mumbo-jumbo to her latest desk and chair. I can't swear that there was chicken blood involved but she did rub some sort of crap all over the place from a little baggie that she pulled out of her purse. I'll let it go for a few weeks and then every so often, wham! She'll come in late—this is a habit with her and I'm not saying it as a racial thing because I don't have a mean bone in my body—and she'll be juggling a Diet Pepsi and some crappy piece of art that her son did at school and barking out "Good mornings!" to whoever might be willing to listen. That's what it's like with her, most days; she's really not much of a worker and that's simply a fact, not a slur on her race or creed or color (I get those mixed up but I'm sure you know what I mean). And it'll be waiting for her, curled up in a side drawer or slopping over the edges of her stapler or wherever the mood strikes me. Another load. It really is kind of funny, you'd have to admit if you saw it even once—I'll bet they'd play it on one of those *America's Funniest Videos* or "You Tube" except for maybe the poop part—and then off we go, the whole 32nd floor, through another round of bonding and holding her and anger and desperate reviews by corporate counselors of our employee files. For added protection, they even installed cameras on our floor which I believe is against the law—I kindly pointed this out one day (through an anonymous note)—but they're only turned on when the office is empty. At night. Of course what they don't know, couldn't really be expected to guess, is that I only do it (a bombing run, as we now call it) on evenings that coordinate with Gary's schedule so that he can get to the tape in the early AM and erase the ugly truth from the video records. You can practically hear the clack-clack-clack of security footwear as they run down to the vault and desperately check the playback after another incident is reported—and there it is, our humble little office, slumbering away through the night by the collective glow of our inactive monitors. It's pretty classic.

I don't really like L'Tesha; I suppose I would agree to that if you were to push me into a corner on the subject—sent me to prison (where I'd no doubt meet a cousin or brother of hers) or put me into one of those secret CIA dungeons and tortured me for a few days—that's what I'd say. "No, I don't much care for the lazy, silly, ugly, useless bitch." That would be the company line, at least, the one I'd go to my grave reciting; and I don't hold anything against her—not even the way she was hired—and it certainly has nothing (or very, very little) to do with the fact that she obviously has some black mom or dad and God-knows-what-else for a parent. Vietnamese, maybe. I do this, what I'm in the process of doing even at this very moment, because it's funny and addictive and one of those things that becomes a kind of ritual in your life. And, quite honestly, in some weird way I find that it helps me to understand her—Ms. L'Tesha Jackson, with the one gold tooth and the ratty hair and a penchant for dark purple clothing—and her kind at those moments of crisis when I'm standing there holding her, letting her cry directly onto my Arrow dress shirt. I watch her, as she looks up at me with those big eyes of hers and I can feel the rise and fall of her breasts, breasts that even after two illegitimate children seem to be full and firm and ripe, and with my arms enshrouding her, looking out with my sad face at my surrounding coworkers—who are all nodding and crying in some sort of communal grief—my hands can make out the top, the absolute rise, of what seems to be an astonishingly solid and beautiful ass, just beneath the cheap fabric of a flowered skirt. And at those moments, these few seconds that we spend together once or twice a month now, I feel all the hatred and fear and desperation of black and white and man and woman drop away and we are free, L'Tesha and me, as we clutch one another there on our industrial carpet—as free as the first plantation owner who ever dipped into that well must have felt, holding some young dark-skinned beauty close to his heaving chest. Yes, she and I are merely associates and working our way through a little office tragedy, but in my mind L'Tesha and I are free, drifting freely out the window next to my desk and sailing off into a perfect sky, above the park and the buildings nearby, away toward the glowing ball of yellow sun that sits hovering on the distant horizon…

NEIL LABUTE

Yep. This piece is definitely a bit rich. Obviously you're creating a character that's very different from you. Does it take a long time to write in a voice that's so foreign to your own?

No. It came relatively quickly. It was a matter of days rather than weeks.

Do you do a lot of drafts of one piece?

I'm a tinker. I do a lot of little tweaking, but I don't think of any of it as vast enough to call it a draft.

It's funny how I'm still fixated on trying to categorize this piece. Is it a character study? Satire? An attack on the follies of humankind?

Just call it a documentary. It's something I did a while back and I needed to get it off my chest. [laughs]

That isn't going to make my job any easier, you know.

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Upper Playground Worldwide
Hunters Point, San Francisco
Photo by Dylan Maddux
upperplayground.com

Wearing all black and white and then breaking it up with some gross green socks is like not telling anyone you speak Japanese until an old lady is in trouble and you're all, "「ちょっとお婆ちゃん、大丈夫?」?"

When you turn yourself into a naive baby cartoon you basically make color your bitch and if it has a problem with that it can suck yo' dick.

This guy looks like a naked magician with maroon legs.

Talk about taking well-tested staples and stacking them on top of each other until you're basically Voltron made up of everything good about men's clothes.

A ratty red sweater on all-black big tits is to the metrosexual community what books are to a rapper.

Puerto Rican chicks are fucking sexy but they have screaming babies and brothers that want to kill you. Midwesterners are clean but they're also boring as shit. When the latter dresses as the former it's as hot as Alicia Keys wearing one of those Nancy Reagan Chanel suits.

EMILY HAINES
& THE SOFT SKELETON
KNIVES DON'T
HAVE YOUR BACK
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JAN 4 MONTREAL - THÉÂTRE OUTREMONT
JAN 5 OTTAWA - BRONSON CENTRE
JAN 6 TORONTO - THE DANFORTH MUSIC HALL
JAN 7 PHILADELPHIA - FIRST UNITARIAN
JAN 8 BOSTON - PARADISE LOUNGE
JAN 9 NYC - HIRO BALLROOM
JAN 10 WASHINGTON - 9:30 CLUB
JAN 11 DETROIT - THE MAGIC BAG
JAN 12 CHICAGO - LAKESHORE THEATER
JAN 13 MINNEAPOLIS - THE VARSITY
JAN 14 WINNIPEG - THE GARRICK THEATRE
JAN 15 SASKATOON - TBD
JAN 16 CALGARY - THE GRAND THEATRE
JAN 17 EDMONTON - THE CITADEL THEATRE
JAN 18 VANCOUVER - COMMODORE BALLROOM
JAN 19 PORTLAND - DOUG FIR LOUNGE
JAN 20 SEATTLE - CROCODILE CAFÉ
JAN 22 SAN FRANCISCO - GREAT AMERICAN MUSIC HALL
JAN 23 LA - EL REY THEATER
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EMILY HAINES & THE SOFT SKELETON
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Every time we take a client out he goes from one or two shots to screaming "Who wants to fucking party!?" (with his pants down) to nappy time, all in the course of about two hours. Are we too zany or are the people who buy our ads reaching new heights of pussiness?

If you like pirates get a nice small skull and crossbones on your upper arm or something. Don't paint your entire leg with the guy from *21 Jump Street* in a really confusing movie that's based on a Disney theme-park ride.

The reason British nerds are so content is they're not outcasts. The whole country is ugly, misanthropic, too smart for its own good, works at a record distributors, collects *Dr. Who* DVDs, and is married to a chubby nurse with a kid from another marriage.

If you check the subways in Tokyo you'll notice they love using their epicanthic folds to pretend they're not sleeping which they are, which is why we were disappointed to see the same scam instituted here in our own institutions.

She's either an empowered slut or the kind of person that will tell your boss you made up the nickname "Bald Hitler."

One of her patches says, "You don't have to fuck people over to survive," which is ironic considering I pay my rent by saying this girl looks like a revolutionary Eric Bogosian if he was a homeless lesbian.

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"Where You At?"

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This guy looks like a sweaty art schlub in a bad sweater taking a big shit but there's something about the way he does it that just exudes Great Guy.

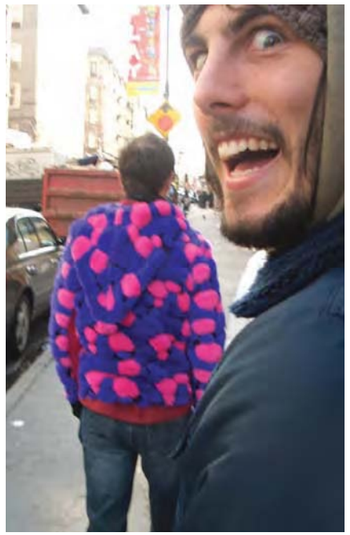
Sometimes, when you see these long, droopy sweaters it's so hard not to picture her at your house on Sunday morning wearing nothing but that and white socks, the only way you can muster the strength to look away is to focus on the part in *Animal House* where nude Donald Sutherland is wearing the same thing.

Winter slip-ons make you look like a smart chick that says super-funny shit like, "Chloe's overrated. I saw her in *Brown Bunny* and I thought she totally blew."

You guys need to take this dude on vacation like a little brown canary in a coalmine where, if he doesn't get laid, you realize nobody can and you move on to the next town.

Everyone hates mullets and dreads and redheads and Canadians with tiny backpacks but if you can pull it off you deserve the National Fuck You Award.

Hats are lame (we call them toques) but if you're not all serious about it like a new dad and you're wearing kind of a goof one it becomes a parody of hats which is good again. (Especially when you're so hot you make a grown man cry.)



This one goes out to the soldiers on the front lines, standing at the edge of the photo so you can capture a balding homo nerd in an ironic candy-raver parka without getting caught.

Why do all the French tourists who come to "Brookleen" to "make photo" of "graff" dress like cool teddy bears?

Is there anything worse than new parents? It's one thing to make sure the baby's nice and warm but why do they dress themselves and their pets like being "comfers cozers" is a matter of life and death?

Is there no respite from your fucking toes!? It's winter and we're still seeing flip-flops and these stupid chink slippers everywhere. So, not only are her toes shit-stained and covered in AIDS but you know they're as cold and clammy as a wet umbilical cord in the snow.

Ah ha. You're old.

Southeast Asia is filled with tons of white guys with no game that want to give talking to hot chicks a try. Too bad they are the gayest, stupidest, corniest hot chicks in the entire fucking world.

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AT CHUMLEY'S

Since 1928, Chumley's on Bedford Street in Greenwich Village has sat behind an unmarked door. It started as a speakeasy and gradually became the gold standard of writers' bars in New York. Everyone from Mailer to Maugham to Steinbeck to Salinger to Faulkner to Fitzgerald hung out at Chumley's. Now it seems like there's a random walking tour going through there every ten minutes, but if you happen in on a quiet day and sit by the fire and get nice and drunk, you can pretend you're a good writer for a little while. It's fun there at night too, when lots of local firemen and preppie types clog the place up and go for it.

PHOTOS: Richard Kern

STYLING: Annette Lamothe-Ramos

HAIR AND MAKEUP: Jenae Wilkens

MODELS: Ida Agrahn, Katherine Joanne Kirk, Martina Correa, and Sofi Berelidze courtesy of Supreme Management

MAKEUP: L'oreal Paris mascara, Nars blush, Chanel eyeliner, Shiseido Silky eyeshadow, Maybelline Dream matte Mousse foundation, Revlon Skinlights bronzer

(l-r): APC top; United Bamboo top, Tiffany & Co. necklace

That's Bobby Kennedy in the photo on the wall there. Chumley's legend has it that RFK sat at this booth while he wrote out an early draft of his presidential campaign platform.

SPECIAL BONUS: HOW TO START AN AWESOME BOOK CLUB

Are you too cool for a book club? Doubt it. They make you smart and, more importantly, they make you SEEM smart to other less smart people. Just imagine: Sitting by the fireplace, wearing big wooly sweaters and drinking hot cider whilst ruminating about fine literature. How is that not awesome? If some delicious gossip happens to slip in during a heady analysis of Nabokov's *Lolita* as an elaborate metaphor for Russian totalitarianism, well, hey, so be it!

WHO SHOULD BE IN YOUR CLUB

Your book club may vary in size, but you'll always need these three types:
The Know-It-All: Has read everything and makes sure you know it. Not only can they expound on *Journey to the End of the Night*, they've actually BEEN to the end of the night.
The Devil's Advocate: Says things like "Holden Caulfield's a dick" for no reason. Starts every sentence with "Yeah, but…"
The Agree-er: She's just psyched to be there.

NAMING YOUR CLUB

Fun part! You can't call your club "The Wormz" because that's ours. You can use some of our rejected names though, such as "The Page Turners" or "Are You There God? It's Me, Book Club." It should be something that looks good on a t-shirt, because one of you is going to have to make book-club t-shirts. It's good for morale and it makes you feel like you're in a gang, like the Pink Ladies but for nerds.

CHOOSING THE BOOK

Some people think that everyone has to agree on the book. This method DOES NOT work. Trust us. Many a book club has fallen because of this myth. It takes like three hours for everyone to come to an agreement. The only way to do it is to get a list of "the best fiction ever" or whatever and go through the list crossing off the books everyone has already read. The remaining books get written down, tossed into a hat, and the person with the next birthday picks the first book and that's that.

SNACKS

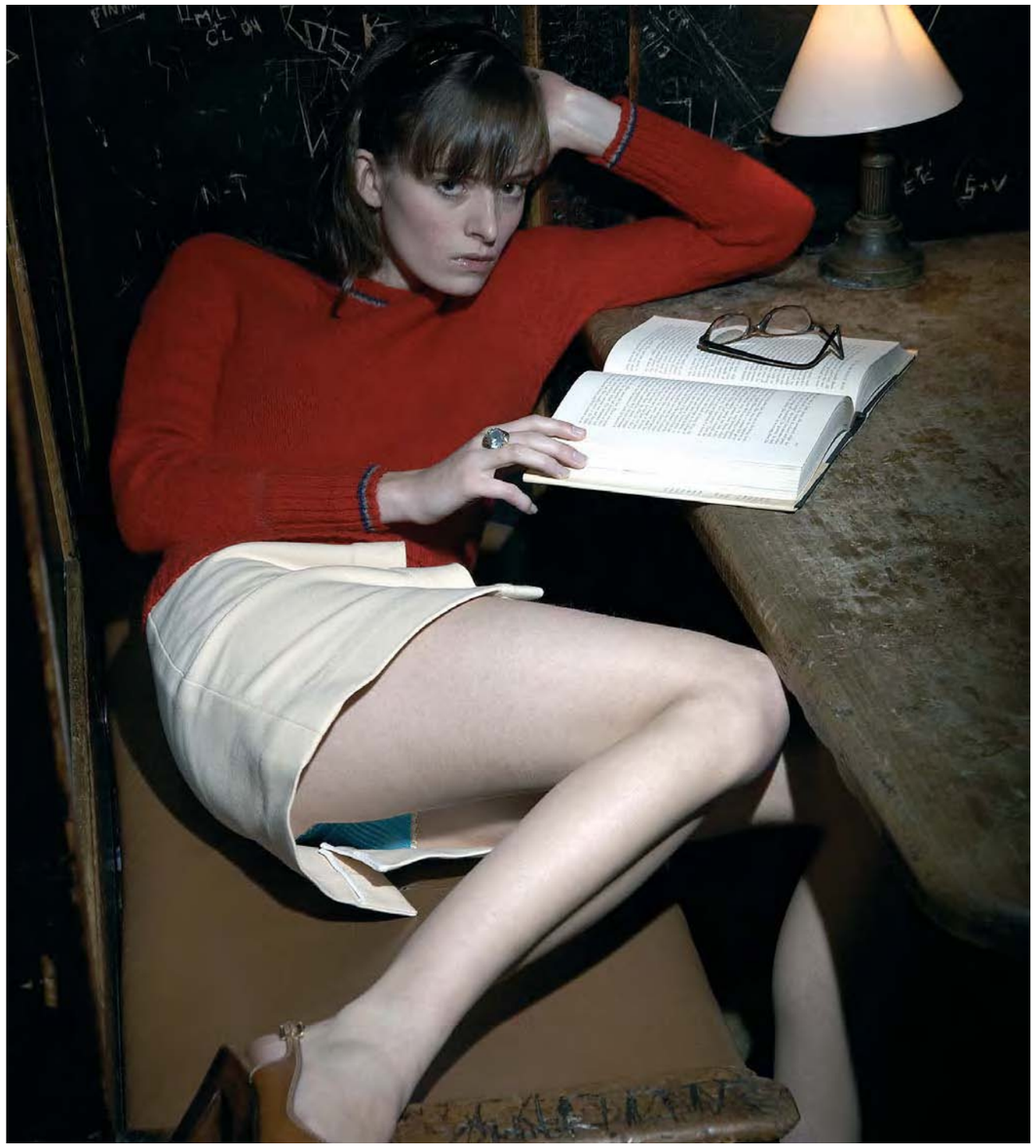
Hopefully you have a friend with a rustic apartment complete with fireplace and lots of quilts and cushions who watches Rachel Ray and gets a boner out of being the ultimate hostess. She'll serve hot cider with cinnamon swizzle sticks and deviled eggs that will make you rethink deviled eggs. Each member should bring something to eat, but this is where the hostess can really shine.

CLUB RULES

Rules are meant to be broken? Not in a book club. This isn't school—no cutting corners or CliffsNotes. If you're supposed to read the first three chapters, then you read the first three chapters. If you read less, you're left in the dust and you don't contribute shit, and if you read more then you risk slipping out a spoiler and that is grounds for suspension, which is kind of like school actually.

LESLEY ARFIN AND AMY KELLNER

(l-r): APC top and tights, American Apparel skirt, Alex + Choe necklace, Jenny Kayne shoes; APC top, Alice Roi pants, vintage necklace



Vintage top, Tevrow + Chase skirt, Loeffler Randall shoes, London Fog glasses, Elle Macpherson Intimates panties

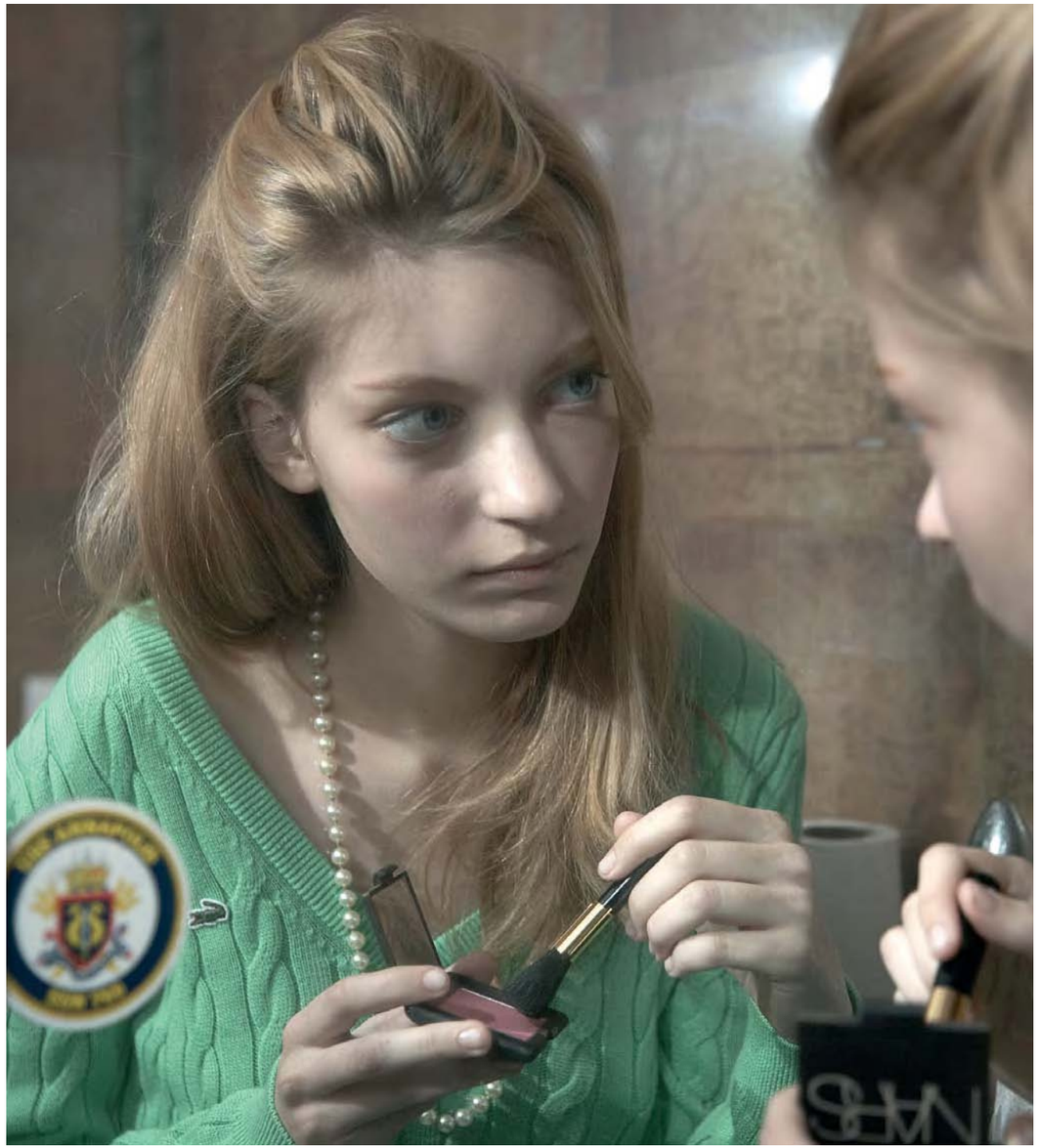
This is our favorite place to sit at Chumley's. It's over in the corner near the fireplace. F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald are said to have consummated their marriage here. That's right—the Fitzgeralds did it in this very booth.

(l-r): Hani:Y top, Samantha Pleet vest; Samantha Pleet dress; Fred Perry top; APC top, Samantha Pleet jumper

Miss Sixty coat, Alice Roi top

Chumley's is the origin of the phrase "86" as in "getting 86'd" from a bar. Chumley's is at 86 Bedford Street, and back in the Prohibition days a cop-friend of the bar would tip them off that a raid was coming by calling the bartender and saying, "86." That was code for, "Get the fuck outta there for a while."

(l-r): Givenchy top, vintage skirt and broach; APC top, Alice Roi shorts, vintage glasses and watch



Lacoste sweater

During Prohibition, the entire ladies' bathroom at Chumley's was an elevator. Seriously. It was one big dumbwaiter, and they would wheel it up and down to get liquor from the store area to the bar.

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Niall Griffiths

Vice: When did you start writing?
Niall: *As soon as I could pick up a pen, I suppose. I'm from a typical working-class Liverpool background. We never had any books in the house. But it was a house full of stories. I had a Welsh grandparent and an Irish grandparent, and they would tell me stories about the war and the old countries and that kind of stuff.*
Was there one author who clinched it for you that you wanted to be a writer too?
When I was ten I found a novel at a jumble sale by this Welsh writer, Ron Berry, called So Long, Hector Bebb. *He writes in a South Wales dialect, and I remember thinking, "This is amazing. The way normal people speak, in factories and on building sites, can actually be literature."*

COMING OF AGE

See, he's not my proper son, not by blood, like, but I adter take him on as family when I married his mother, didn't I? Ad no choice in the matter. I mean yeh can tell he's not one of mine just by looking at him; more meat on a jockey's whip. A strong fart'd blow him away. No *way* he's gunna have any blood of *mine* in his veins, is there? But his mum, she likes her bit of rough, like, and I'm partial to a blond brewstered divorcée with tits all bought n paid for like a pair of friggin watermelons, so I adter take her boy on when I married her, didn't I? Don't know who his father was; some penpusher, friggin accountant or somet, never done a day's real work in his life. Dodgy genes, like, knowmean? But, y'know, he's part of the family now whether I fuckin like it or not and he turned 18 last week an I asked him what he wanted for a prezzie and djer know what he said? A buke. A fuckin *buke!* For his 18th! Gunner spend the day he becomes a man fuckin reading! Fucks to that, man. Bollox. So c'med, said I, I'll take yeh for yer first pint, yer first legal bevvy as a man. Told the missis I was taking him to the winebar, just a quiet couple like, an she was happy. Half way down a bottle of gin and 20 friggin Prozac inside her, *course* the daft bint was happy.

An the little get didn't wanna go but I wasn't gunna take no for an answer. He said I'm not going I said ye fuckin *are*. Tradition, this, I said; you become part of *my* fuckin family and you'll take part in its traditions. I did this with my old man on my 18th, and he did it with his. Fuckin heritage, lad, I said. He says that he doesn't drink. I told him *every* lad of mine drinks, fuckin stepson just or no. Besides, place I was gunna take him to, probly best off if he *didn't* drink. Keep the lead in his pencil, like, knowmean?

So yeh, I takes him down the Dock Road, to the Crown. Thursday Night Special, wannit? We goes in an all the lads're already there, Willy an his brothers, Bob Thompson, all just clocked off an already friggin steamboats the lot of them, not even seven o' clock. The boy's gone all shy an fuckin timid like but I plonks him down an Willy puts his arm round him an starts singin "Happy Birthday" loud in his friggin ear like an I goes up to the bar an gets two pints an a double vodders, slips the vodders into the pint I give the boy. He sips at it an goes fuckin green, looks like he's just about to friggin honk up all over the table. Honest to God, there's no blood of mine in him, no fuckin way. Pure embarrassing if there was, tellin yeh. The place is fuckin chocka, all blokes like with it bein a Thursday, dead hot n sweaty, y'know the way it gets in there. Bouncer's already havin a hard time tryna keep this fuckin shower under control like an the first girl hasn't even come on stage yet. Never seen it that packed. The boy, well, he's like a fuckin rabbit in headlights, inny? He's never seen anything like it before in his life, knowmean? Should be enjoyin himself like but he looks like he's gunna up an leg it any fuckin minute. Felt like tellin him that becomin a man ain't bleedin easy, it's not meant to be just *fun*; it's somet you've gorra, what, fuckin *endure*. Happens to us all. Get used to it lad, face it fuckin head-on an be brave I wanted to say but the noise is so loud yeh can't speak like it fuckin always is on a Thursday an anyways Willy's still holdin the boy, singin in his ear. He's gone red as a beetroot, the boy. Square peg in round hole. But fair play to him he manages to finish his glass an Bob goes up to get him another. I tip ahl Bob the wink as he passes so that he'll know to spike it an he gives us a grin an a nod. Good lad, Bob. Knows the score, that man; see, same thing happened to him on his 18th, didn't it? It's what happens to all the bucks round here when they come of age, like; their old man takes em down the Crown. First legal night on the piss, first sniff of fanny. Heritage, lad, innit? Pure heritage. Tradition. Simple as. An where the *fuck* would we be without it, eh?

The lad must've had five, six pints an several neat vodkas unbeknownst to him like by the time the first girl comes on. That dark girl, Melody she calls herself altho her real name's fuckin Eileen or somet. Bold girl, like. Not fuckin shy, knowmean? An she's down to her knickers, red crotchless numbers like, doin the splits at the front of the stage so close ye could friggin smell it an the lad's eyes, they're on fuckin *stalks* man, tellin yiz. Never seen anythin like ar Melody in his life. Looked like he was about to fuckin blub or somet to be honest an then all the lads start pointin at him an chantin 18! 18! 18! over n over again an the girl, that Melody one, she comes straight over to him through the crowd, hands all fuckin over her like an she sits down on his knee an rubs her tits in his face y'know the way they do, an then she just ups an fuckin *drags* the poor lad on stage. Drags him by the hand an she's got some strength that girl; poor bastard's got no choice but to follow her up, has he? I mean her arms're twice the size of his. Crowd's goin nuts like an he's up there shakin like a fuckin leaf. Almost started to feel sorry for him but jeez he's 18, he's a *man*; gorra learn to behave like one, hasn't he? This kinda thing *hurts*, sometimes; he's gorra *learn* that. It ain't all easy, becomin a man. I mean, look at me; three wives in ten years, no fuckin picnic, that, lad. Divorce is a messy fuckin business, no lie. You stop bein a kid an things start gettin friggin *complicated*, don't they? Nowt easy in this world. Fuck no. Just somethin you've gorra learn. Just gorra have someone to help ye through it, like.

So she took his kex down. Just unzipped em an let them drop with his undies n all an there he is, tremblin like, bollocko, swayin either with terror or the bevvy or both like, this friggin shrivelled worm-thing between his legs, on show for all to see. Awful. Fuckin awful. An that Melody, she takes his knob an points it out at the audience an the crowd went even crazier, pissin themselves laughin, an the lad starts cryin but he's just standin there, kex round his ankles like, fuckin humiliatin for the boy. Everyone's laughin at him an Melody tips him on his back on the floor with his feet facing the crowd like an she gets on top of him an tries to shag him, I mean as I say she's not fuckin shy that one, but Jeez... like tryna shove a marshmallow in a fuckin parkin meter. Pure fuckin embarassin it was. Bob an Willy an the rest of the lads, they're in fuckin *fits* an I'm standin up, shoutin at the boy to fuckin give her one for me like but nowt's happenin. Honest to God, hung like a Chinese mouse, him. Fuckin mortifyin, it was. An I weren't gunna be showed up like that was I so I says fuck this an gets up on the stage meself, Melody's squatting like with her back to the audience, can't see me, an I gets into position behind her. Bouncer comes steamin over but he can't get through the crush, an anyway I'm in the girl up to the friggin plums in a second. Gorra show the boy how to do it, like, haven't I? *Course* I have. Retain some self-respect, like, innit? Pure fuckin embarrassin, that. Stepson or no, he's associated with me, it was me who took him there. Makin me look a knob'ed, that. Melody's now leanin forward on her hands like, hands an knees, straddlin the lad, an I'm givin it to her so friggin hard that I've pushed her forward an I only realize too late like that we're both positioned over the boy's face; I mean he's still flat on his back on the deck, blubbin away like a ponce. No blood of mine in that boy, honest to God. But aye, he's still in that position when I pull out so *I* couldn't help where I friggin bloshed, could I? *I* couldn't help where it went. Taught the soft-arse a lesson, anyway, didn't it? If yer knocked over, get back up on yer feet. Fuckin end of lesson. Simple as. An if yeh can't gerrit up yeh gerrout of there quick-quick. Got things to learn, that boy, no fuckin lie.

So yeh, that was me; I did me thing then gave it toes. Too fuckin embarrassed to hang around, everyone there thinkin he was me blood relative, like. *Mortified* I was. Went off on a bender for a couple of days, gets home hungover to shite like and there she is, going on, what have I done to her son, in a terrible state, won't come out of his room, locked himself in, all this shite. About a week ago this was an I haven't seen the lad since. Not sure I want to, either, just yet, to be honest with yiz; I mean, right fuckin embarrassin episode that was. No son of mine who can't gerrit up. Try an show someone a bit of heritage, get them involved like, try an include them in yer family's history an what happens? See what yer get? A loader friggin grief, that's what. Everyone laughin at yer on the shopfloor. Tellin yeh; next birthday, if we're both still around like, he'll get his friggin buke. Wish I'd never bothered now, to be honest. Fuckin farce, that's what it was. Just embarrassin.
NIALL GRIFFITHS

Illustration by Milano Chow

Photo by Alex Sturrock

Is the dialect in this story from Liverpool or Wales?
It's halfway in between, I guess. Liverpool is very close to Wales.
Everyone in Britain is drunk all the time.
Yeah. It's drinking with a real hysterical, desperate edge. Every town on a weekend night is just absolute pandemonium. It's the willingness, the eagerness, to divest themselves of every last shred of dignity. And to end up in the gutter, the women with their tits hanging out in a pool of vomit, and men beating each other up and picking on the weak. Saturday nights are horrible in town.

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Sam Brumbaugh

Vice: When did you start writing?
Sam: *Well like every other sad-sack teenager, I had a diary. It wasn't really self-conscious though. It was pretty clinical. But there was an urge there.*
Were there other writers in your family?
No. My dad was a painter. Well, he was really a banker, but he had this lost 70s period where he'd get stoned in the attic and paint and read Foreign Affairs.
That's awesome.
Yeah.
When was the first time you were published?
I got a story in Open City *in 2001. I was always quietly working on fiction, but you really have to put in the hours. At the same time, if you don't have another life—particularly when you're in your 20s—you won't have a lot to write about.*

BARON IN VEGAS

Baron came out of the elevator holding the guitar. There was a white door in a white wall, a small red light with a button underneath. He pressed the button. A camera swiveled an inch above him. A voice asked him who he was.
"Baron," he said.
The door buzzed.
He stepped into an over-air-conditioned, windowless waiting room. A round-faced woman with green-streaked black hair sat at a desk covered with potted plants. She wore a new and oversize Ramones t-shirt. She glanced up at him with big, sparkling black eyes. "Have a seat," she said, gesturing toward a white sofa.
Baron sat down with the guitar. He stared at the *Billboard* magazines fanned out on the glass table. He did not look up again at the girl. He came from brooding, thickset people, and he did not look at women much and when he looked down from seeing a pretty woman he did not usually imagine her image. But the receptionist had tiny, bleached Tic-Tac teeth, teeth like Beth's. Beth had a pretty, sharp wedge of a face and beady little teeth like peas if peas could be white. She was tall and hard-lined and so white as to seem albino. Escorting people to their tables—her white hair done up in buns on either side of her head, her mouth a thick red slash of lipstick—she had an almost zombie-like disassociation. Initially, he took this to be drollness, but more and more he'd suspected it was dumbness. Her face was so incurious—the only softening a red smear in her cheeks when she'd tire after a rush.
It was only a small kitchen thing. They'd smoked together on breaks, drank at the bar down the block with the others after their shift. Once they'd woken up next to each other, and this had repeated itself a few times and he could not get over how far she could spread her long white legs. She would lay back as he crawled up over her. She would hold his head in both hands, like a barber would, and look right at him. He could not get over this in some fundamental way. He came from ugly people.
There was a buzzing.
He looked up. A frosted Plexiglass door slid open, seemingly of its own volition. There was a hallway, and he heard a voice, but no one came through.
The receptionist did not look up.
Baron took a *Billboard* and flipped through the photos. Artists in tuxedos or tight shimmering gowns, holding gold records or awards, looking very happy with their careers, with the people in the trade, and he looked down at Tim's battered black guitar case and saw how lost in time Tim was. Tim on the cover of his one record, his face slanted down with a kind of wincing indifference, sitting on the decrepit wooden steps of an unseen house, dead leaves at his feet.
A man was standing over him. He wore a headset and there was a small black box attached to his belt. He cupped a hand over the salamander-like receiver at his mouth. "I'm immensely sorry about this," he whispered assuredly, "I know you've come a long way, but I've got a call I've got to stay on right now."
Baron didn't say a word, but the man held up a finger, prompting him to stay quiet.
Baron, used to brusqueness in kitchens, stared indifferently.
"Great," he said, dropping his hand off the receiver and walking away. "OK…"
Baron did not know if the man was still talking to him. They hadn't actually had a conversation, and he couldn't tell until the man had disappeared back behind the frosted door.
Baron had sent Beth a postcard about coming here. "*Coincidentally…*"
He'd left her a few messages. He'd arrived this morning and hadn't been able to help some kind of looking around. He'd gone to a coffee shop in her neighborhood. Had they run into each other there, he imagined there would be a long, uneasy moment, and he'd had no idea how he'd explain himself out of that moment. But he'd stayed in the coffee shop two hours. Got up and got back in line, ordered a second and then a third coffee. He'd even read *USA Today*. He'd finally moved to an outside table as a kind of self-negotiated preliminary to leaving. He saw a few pretty girls making their way to and from their cars, tank tops and showy hips out of low-slung jeans, but he'd been insolent about them because he might be seeing Beth.
But there was no sign of her, of course, and the only sign of being in the desert, of being where she lived, was a small green lizard against the silver umbrella pole, its stomach expanding and contracting in some kind of rigor-mortis terror.
He looked down at the black guitar case, flabby with wear and duct-taped along the spine. He gripped the handle. Maybe he shouldn't be selling his uncle's guitar. It was all he'd gotten in the will. It was all he possessed of any value. But selling the guitar brought him here, where Beth was. He was selling the guitar for a last-chance excuse of contact, a vain improbability of pressing his fingers one more time down on her stretched-out legs, of pressing on as to what, if anything, was behind Beth's matter-of-fact and almost naive assumption of this posture.
There was something silvery and fleeting about Beth, impossible to connect to his warm hand on the plump curve of her thigh and the rough-hewn heat of her crotch. He was never able to connect the two. She'd never allowed it.
He went to sleep so many nights with the feel of the softness between the hardness of her knees and the hardness of her hips. He woke up most mornings with the feel of this place. It was troublesome, not least because he was aging. Forty coming and his stomach sandbagging and the state of the stomach was the symbol of aging and capability to so many female eyes. He knew the sharp eyes proximity brings, but Beth's physical indiffer-

Illustration by Milano Chow

ence to his messy physique was so rare, another good-looking girl was not close to an immediate possibility.

There was the buzzing again.

"Suze," the man—headsetless—said from the door, "maybe you could get Tim's nephew here some coffee. Or tea. Herbal tea, maybe. Would he like some herbal tea?"

"I'll ask him," Suze said.

"Coffee," Baron said to the girl. And he stood and took the guitar and followed the man in past the frosted door. They came into a large white office. There were blue corduroy love seats on either side of a black Pyrex table, and he sat down facing the man. The man was short and balding, a mustache and a round face and hard small dark eyes. He wore an oversize white t-shirt, crisp blue jeans, and Birkenstock sandals. He held out his hand. "Deke," he said.

Baron passed the case over.

Deke opened the case, glanced at the guitar, turned it over, and slipped it back into the case.

He took a check out of a yellow envelope already there on the table and handed it to Baron.

"This is for $2,200," Baron said.

"That's what it says."

"On the phone, you said five."

"A week ago I said five."

"I haven't even talked to you and you're already going back on your word."

"Look, I don't doubt this is the guitar, but the shape it's in…"

"It's in good shape," Baron said. "It hasn't really been played much in the last 20 years."

"Good shape is a problem."

"I don't understand."

"The worse shape it's in, the better it views. Tim's guitar lacks, you know, sympathetic wear and tear, the grease of personality."

"You offered $5,000, sight unseen. You had this check written out for $2,200, sight unseen."

"Your uncle's death, we thought his passing away might have sparked more reinterest—apart from the Dutch reissue."

There was a silence.

"You *do* know about the Dutch reissue?"

"No. From what?"

"What do you mean?"

"From what material?"

"Oh they probably just took an old vinyl copy, you know… unless they got ahold of the master tapes. But it would have been nice of them to consult you, for perhaps, some photos, or liner notes. Something for you to do..."

Baron stared at Deke.

Deke's face had compressed slightly around his eyes. Deke had mistakenly gotten a bit personal, and now he seemed momentarily lost in some soft-footed zone of conversational ambiguity. He sat back and folded his hands, began nodding as if remembering some long-ago grave wrong.

There was a buzzing. He reached over and pressed a button.

"Arnold on four," Suze said over the speaker.

"Arnold?"

"Vladistock Arnold."

"Right."

He looked at Baron. "You'll excuse me a minute?" He said, standing and slipping on the headset and walking out.

Baron looked around at the walls: Brightly tentacled Fillmore West posters, photos of Jimi Hendrix, Robert Plant, Mick Jagger. The same old faces, doing the same old things. Weren't there other people, ever, to try out on the walls? It was like the chain restaurants on the strips, these faces so pervasive as to be unnoticeable. Tim had been so obscure. Even as an uncle. He'd only met him twice. He had clear memories of both times because there was a funny kind of presence there. He'd gone to the bus station with his dad, and Tim was standing outside waving and seemed to get in the car before they'd even stopped. He seemed to be full of enthusiasm and cheerful news. Baron had been missing a tooth and Tim had turned with his bright green eyes and curly blond hair and squinting smile and had asked Baron if he'd lost it defending his girl. His dad and Tim had broken out in laughter before Baron could answer. Baron had been a chubby boy and he'd at first been embarrassed, but then he'd realized they were not laughing in the way other kids did, and he'd laughed along because it was nice to hear his father laughing. They'd gone to some bar downtown and Baron had a hamburger and a Coke while Tim tuned up at the other end of the room. Tim had disappeared afterward, the bedroom his father had made up and the table his mother set of no use.

Tim showed up one more time. Two or three years later, unannounced at the front door at 3 PM, a thin, black-haired woman sitting in the old, square car behind him, the engine running. The sparkle in Tim's eyes seemed to have smeared across his cheekbones, and his blond curls were whitened by the sun and frizzed. His face was leathery and thin, his arms and wrists so thin it seemed to make his hands shake.

Your daddy here?

He's at work.

How are you, kid?

I'm Baron.

Your daddy left me some money, Baron. Mind if I go take a look?

In college, he'd once found a white-label promotional copy of Tim's record. $2.99 in the cut-out bin. He'd tried to understand the songs, but the soft confessional intimacy made him uneasy. He liked hard stuff, forthrightness, and never otherwise thought too much about music. He heard music in his car and little elsewhere and he had nothing in common with the tousle-haired, torn-sweatered girls alone on their dorm-room futons, listening to Leonard Cohen.

The paucity of invention some imagined watchfulness over solitude.

This line was from the one review he'd ever read about Tim's record. In *Sounds*, from October 1979. His father kept it in a picture book with old photos and other minor artifacts of Tim's short career. Tim had been his father's little brother.

Deke came in and sat back down.

There was a long silence.

"Shouldn't Tim have had the master tapes of his record somewhere?" Baron asked.

"Those licenses to the record company are often for life."

"For life? His is over."

"Perpetuity, then."

Baron leaned forward. "Nobody bought his label. They folded."

"UAI bought out the catalogue."

"I've seen Tim's papers. There's no contract that says that."

"Well that is an issue for you to take up with UAI. It is hard sometimes for a company to verify the estate." Deke leaned forward and looked analytically at Baron. "You *are* the estate?"

"Are masters like that generally valuable?"

"Depends. Why?"

"No reason."

"Well, perhaps you'll have the statute of limitations on your side. But you know, they are a very successful company. It will cost you."

Baron stared at him.

"The thing about the $5,000, you see, is that when your uncle died we expected something, some kind of minor stir, to happen in Japan. That loner folky stuff is so big over there now."

"UAI should have sent him some money," Baron said. "Just a little money once in a while. Tim was very degraded at the end of his life."

"Well, whatever their relationship, we'd hoped to take advantage of new movements and put this guitar on the casino wall in Tokyo."

Deke folded his hands and leaned back. "Tokyo, you know, is preferable to Rotterdam."

Baron held the check. "I can't do this."

"You're here."

"For this, I mean." He held up the check.

"What did you fly here? Southwest?"

Deke stood and went to his desk. He pulled out a small booklet of pink paper, scribbled something. He reached into his desk and pulled out an envelope.

Baron watched as he counted out $240 in 20s.

The man looked up from his counting. "Round trip from Iowa City, right?"

He came over and handed Baron the money. On top was glossy coupon for a free meal at the casino restaurant.

Baron held the money and the check and the coupon. "How do I get out of here?"

"I'll walk you out."

These are a part of Jack White's rare guitar collection. Will they be on eBay some day decades from now?

Baron stood.

Deke held out his hand. "It was nice doing business with you."

Baron nodded, just enough to disagree. But he'd taken the money, and he shook the man's hand.

They came back out through the waiting room. He glanced sideways to the girl, but she did not look up.

At the elevator, the man pressed in a code.

"One thing," Baron said. "How did you know so quickly it was the actual guitar?"

"The photo on the back of the record," he said. "I have Tim's record."

Baron looked at him.

"I'm actually a fan. I grew up in the late 70s. It's a very nice record. It has, you know, a real gray-day emotion."

"An emotion otherwise hard for you to locate?"

"Don't assume monetary toughness precludes other, more complicated feelings."

"Greed does."

"I'm sorry you feel that way."

"I'm sorry you didn't like the record enough to keep your word."

"It's the company word, and that always has to be able to change. The word was one thing a week ago, now it's another. You got your money. You decided to do this."

The elevator arrived.

Baron stepped in without another word or a look back. The doors closed as he turned around. Baron could see the elongated smudge of his reflection in the elevator's steel. His hand felt the absence of the weight of the guitar. Tim's had written his spooked-out songs on the guitar, and now the guitar was gone and the feeling from the sale was sharp, real shame.

The elevator sank effortlessly. An old song played through the speaker above, folksy, with mandolin, and his thoughts went to nothing, as if the reverberations of the melodies carried away all sense of weight and purpose. And for an instant he seemed to understand something about his uncle, about musicians in general, ambivalence settling in with the starry accountability of a passing melody.

But he wasn't a musician, he had no way of using ambivalence. He was a line cook, and he came from ugly people. Tim was the one good-looking one—his goldenness treated as an embarrassing mishap by the family, as if Tim's mother had been raped by Ryan O'Neal. And Baron had grown up, like his family, embarrassed by his uncle's obscure career—almost to the point of permanent disavowal, until one of the skater blond, Zeppelin freak brothers from a nearby modern house in a better neighborhood had asked him, with a kind of restrained amazement, if Tim was really his uncle.

Baron had nodded as if caught, but the kid had invited him over to watch *Quadrophenia* and Baron had tried pot for the first time and he still remembered the night as a kind of initiation into his wobbly and immense teenage years.

Now he was nearing 40 and gaining only weight. Beth had long pale pin-up legs and was otherwise unattributable to anything in particular. He'd come to Vegas with a single angle of desire, the guitar a prop, but Beth might as well be a rock floating out in space and even the artifact office had seemed like some cold and solitary lunar world. But the elevator, as it sank, felt crowded with body warmth, crowded with the recent presence of dozens of others down below, pulling away.

SAM BRUMBAUGH

Where did the idea for this story come from?

My friend Dave Berman emailed me to tell me that this musician Jackson Frank's guitar and the acetate of his first record were up for sale on eBay. I was like, "Oh god."

It is kind of sad.

Obviously some relative of his had inherited it and put it on there to make some money. It was the guitar he wrote all those great songs on and there it was on eBay. That was the germ of the idea for this story.

But what about the girl in the story?

I guess when I look at relationships, I focus on a single thing about a person. Something like how long and white someone's legs are can sustain me for two months. That can be enough.

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Richard Hell

Vice: When you were a kid, were there any writers in particular that made you say, I'm going to move to New York and do what they do?

Richard: *Yeah, any of them that were drunk and had a lot of sex. For me, it was actually Dylan Thomas. But it could have been any of 30 others that had those qualities: Drunk and sexy.*

In this story the narrator mentions how girls always had to put up a token amount of resistance to sex back when you were younger…

There are still pockets of that today. But from the little that I know of it, it seems like sex is often thought of as completely recreational now for people in their 20s. You know, girls casually getting ass-fucked on the first date. There wasn't too much of that in the 50s and 60s. I mean, even Jack Kerouac was really hung up. The way he talks about women and women talk about him, it seems like it was an ordeal.

PUBLIC HAIR

Yesterday there was a pretty girl sitting with her girlfriends in front of my wife and me at a movie and most of the time all I could see of her was her hair. When you were sitting behind girls in classrooms in grade school, their hair could drive you crazy. It wasn't even actually alive, but it had more personality than most people because of the strange way it was involved with the girl it belonged to. It was out of your reach while being right there, completely exposed. It was like spying on someone sleeping.

In third grade I was crazy about Mimi McLellen. That was her name. If I try to picture her, there's no face. Her dirty-blond hair is in a big bouffant. But no one that young would have worn a bouffant like that I don't think. And this was 1958 and hardly anyone would be wearing a hairdo like that until Jackie Kennedy showed up two or three years later.

I lay in in my bed at night thinking of Mimi McLellen, and then fantasizing getting hit by a car so that she would take my hand, and I could tell her that I loved her.

In the sixth grade there was Janet Edelstein. It is probably Janet's hair I put on Mimi. Because Janet did have a big dark blonde bouffant, preserved by hair spray. People call that hairstyle a "helmet," but it's more like a silken mist, a soft fragrant mesh of crystallization. The young girls wore white blouses with ring-neck collars and cardigans and culottes. Maybe a delicate gold-colored chain necklace, and tennis shoes or Bass loafers and bobby socks. Many of the girls had breasts by then. Janet's were larger than most.

She was another one I never revealed my feelings to. A year or two later, maybe even three, we chanced on each other somewhere and we talked and it turned out she'd had a crush on me in that same period. That seemed tragic. It was Shakespearean.

I can't remember when I started masturbating, but it was long before I could come. There was no ejaculation, but it felt just like coming. We thought there was something perverse and inferior about jacking off. Having sex alone. I had this technique for excusing it where I wouldn't start until I could give myself a hard-on without actually touching my cock.

Thinking of those fantasies now, I wish I could see them as if they were movies, because, since I was so ignorant about sex, it would be cool to see what I was picturing.

There was a great *Mad* magazine spread in the 60s featuring photos of 3-D versions of children's drawings—photos of everyday objects constructed as if the children's drawings of them were accurate. Like a stubby little airplane with different-length wings that pointed in different directions, and propellers on them that looked like broken matchsticks, and dripping misspelled words on its fuselage.

Human works that don't hide the crudity of the approximate nature of their representations are the best. Anything people do is a failed representation, a translation or degredation, of an original.

At the same time, the little I did know about the mechanics of sexual activity when I was 13 was plenty. Drawing a pencil picture no more detailed than an infinity sign with a dot in the middle of each side of it, and directly below that a little hut or beehive that had a triangular patch of scribble in the bottom center of it was enough to give a boy a giant hard-on. I spent half the eighth grade having to walk with my schoolbooks held in front of my jeans to hide the sideways bulge. Sometimes a few drops of liquid would escape just from the friction of the fabric stretched across it.

When I eventually got a finger or two inside a vagina, at 13 or 14, it was like being ordained into a new dimension, almost supernatural. I went for a long walk afterwards, furtively passing my fingers under my nose every few hundred yards. That odor was a trace and insignia of my new kingdom, like Arthur pulling the sword from the stone.

I didn't have full-scale sex until I was 15. My only interest in her was that I thought she might let me have sex with her. Sex drive overcomes almost everything. Many have died behind their dicks. After all, where does reckless aggression come from but testosterone, and where does testosterone come from? Many have died and many around them have been totally fucked. And often greatly liked it.

But this unlucky girl didn't like it, or very much of anything else, as far as I could tell. She was a waitress at a Big Boy drive-in near the university. She was 19 and a hillbilly from Appalachia and she was not just narrow-minded and ignorant, but dumb as a rock and about as energetic. I flirted with her when I'd go in for a hamburger. I told her I was a pre-med student. It wasn't long before she'd given me the key to her apartment.

The making out was not relaxed. It was like hacking through wilderness brush that clung to your ankles and scratched your face, as you struggled on, further and further, your heartbeat racing, because the incentive was so powerful. Namely female genitals: Dripping wet pussy. In the end, her pussy wasn't even very wet, she was so nervous and put upon. Fucking her was horrible, though god knows I couldn't get enough. Even once her clothes were off and she was lying under me on the bed, she didn't participate, but resisted for appearance's sake, all the way through full penetration, which she refrained from giving any sign of joining, but rather lay there stoically, performing only a last symbolic hip buck or two of denial and refusal.

I understand there still are cultural strata where this is standard behavior even among married people. Thank god for pornography. Thank god for the sexual revolution and the pill, and rebellious, fun-loving girls. Though I can't deny I am still repressed and American enough to like sex dirty. And I do love hair. Because it's dead but personal and because I'm moved by the futility of its attempts to warm and protect the places where it grows.
RICHARD HELL

Illustration by Milano Chow

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"LOVED THE DISC. PLEASE DON'T HURT ME. YOU GUYS ARE FUCKING CRAZY."
–AIN'T IT COOL NEWS

"IT'S BETTER THAN *60 MINUTES*"
–MP3.COM

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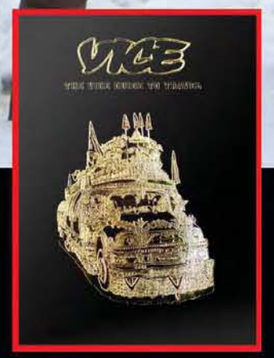

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Blaise Kearsley

Vice: How long have you been writing?
Blaise: *Oh my gosh, forever. Since as long as I can remember.*
What kind of stuff did you write when you were younger?
Fictionalized memoir-type pieces. The day John Lennon died, I was with my mom in the car and heard it on the radio. She was really upset, so I got really upset. I went home and wrote a story about it. I didn't really know who he was, so I made up stuff about who he was and what he meant to me.
Cute.

EDGE OF SEVENTEEN

You and Katherine are drunk on wine coolers and you've forgotten all about stabbing Ziggy with the Ginsu knife and running for your lives. The three of you cozy down in the dark, Ziggy in the middle, beneath several layers of blankets and unzipped sleeping bags, and you listen to the sounds of the leaves rustling in the trees outside. Then Ziggy turns and puts your face in his hands and kisses you. For a second you worry about Katherine and how it must feel to be her in that moment. It occurs to you that if you were a better person you might stop him but you're not. You were just lying there doing nothing and suddenly this beautiful man starts kissing you. And he kisses you like no one ever has kissed you before. Perhaps this is because every boy you've ever kissed before is a child. Ziggy's hair smells like apple butter and Suave conditioner and you think that this is probably what it would be like to make out with Michael Hutchence, which you'd totally do if you ever met him.

Ziggy gently pulls away from you. He smiles and sighs sweetly but you wonder why he's stopping. Maybe he didn't like it. Maybe you have cigarette breath. Maybe you kiss like a juvenile. The answer comes back to you in aural form: You hear Ziggy and Katherine slobbering all over each other. Now you're confused. He must sense this because he reaches back and pulls you close behind him. He's totally reading your mind. Now you are thinking, "Holy fucking shit," and when he kisses you again and then kisses Katherine again you are freaking out all over yourself and you are reminded of that movie *Summer Lovers* starring Daryl Hannah and Peter Gallagher about a three-way love affair in Greece, but you are in Newton, Massachusetts, in the woods behind a public playground, and that is so fucking unbelievably kick-ass.

Now you've got one hand on Ziggy's belt buckle. Buzzing and floating in a teen-dream trance you try to mount him. In so doing, you learn through the coming together of the layers of your jeans and his, that IT IS HARD AND IT IS HUGE. This is scary and intriguing at the same time. You know that wanting to dry-hump him is not in the best interest of your friendship with Katherine but you are overcome with the need to let Ziggy know that if you were alone with him you would totally go all the way. He keeps going back and forth between the two of you until you realize he's kissing her while his fingers are down your pants. When you reach over to rub his thigh your hand lands on an arm that isn't his. You're not about to start caressing Katherine. To you, this is what a threesome must be. It's all about taking turns. This tryst goes on for what seems like forever and that's still not long enough.

When you wake up in the morning it's to the sound of rain drizzling on nylon. The sun is barely up. Katherine stirs, then Ziggy. He starts a slow-motion replay of the night before and none of you have even brushed your teeth. The world is timeless, the birds are singing, your pants are still on you and so are all of your limbs. You're a little worried about what your hair looks like but it is a beautiful morning and you make a secret silent vow to be cosmically connected to this moment for the rest of your natural-born life. Part of you can't wait to be alone with Katherine for the essential comparing of notes and to go over every bit of minutiae starting from the moment Ziggy picked the two of you up from where you sat curbside, certain that he wouldn't show.

The three of you drive back to your house. Your parents aren't home so you invite Ziggy in. You and Katherine sit on the floor against your bed and Ziggy sits on the floor across from you. You're quiet and a bit disoriented and you can't believe that the hot guy from the Coffee Connection is in your room. You offer tea. You don't even drink tea. No one you know drinks tea. You drink sugar with a tablespoon of coffee in it and shotgunned cans of Golden Anniversary but you think that Celestial Seasonings is appropriate.

While you put the kettle on in the kitchen you imagine Ziggy coming in to tell you that he really wants to see you again and he kisses you and you squeeze his ass and he fondles your left breast which you only recently realized is a little bit smaller than the right one. But before the Lemon Zinger has a chance to cool down Ziggy says he should probably get going and you're instantly nervous for all of you because good-byes are always weird. You know you'll never hang out with him again but that's fine because you are mature enough to be OK with that. Besides, when you and your best friend have spent a night in a tent with a 20-something Michael Hutchence look-alike from out of nowhere, you have truly been blessed.

You have your serious one-on-one with Katherine ("Could you hear it when he fingered me?" she asks you), and you both agree not to tell anyone about camping with Ziggy except for your closest friends. This means within 24 hours everyone knows. You both curl up in front of the TV and watch Saturday-morning cartoons until you fall asleep. Ziggy stops working at the Coffee Connection just as mysteriously as he started, but the fact of him breathes new life into your old scene, so much so that you wish you had one more summer before high school graduation. You are left with a sense of something you can't quite name; a feeling that meeting him would somehow turn out to be one of the milestones that paves the road to something like adulthood.

Two years and two intense boyfriend-type relationships later, you're home from college and you've even possibly declared a maybe major. One warm July night you trudge back home from a 21+ rock show at the Paradise. You find a folded-up piece of paper sticking out of the mailbox. It has your name written on it and inside it says, "Hey. If you're around call Ziggy."
BLAISE KEARSLEY

Illustration by Milano Chow

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AS SEEN ON DG

Illustration by Milano Chow

Jeff Johnson

Vice: When's the very first time you can remember writing fiction?
Jeff: *Probably in grade school. I used to make up stories about really obese kings of powerless countries, like Greenland. They'd start wars and have a lot of paperwork to do for some reason, but they'd always end up more concerned with eating butter and roast beef and stuff.*
What's the hardest thing about writing a short story?
Making them about things other than butter and roast beef.

HIS & HERS WATCHES

He called into a local radio station upward of 60 times in January of 1989. Provided a series of correct answers that surpassed the other callers' series of answers and advanced southward to the state capital for the semi-finals. One night at a Holiday Inn on the main drag (*Golden Girls* followed by Pepcid AC) and a rock-and-roll themed brunch. He had Chuck Berry-Berry waffles. Two "amps" fashioned from sausage patties and whipped cream. Decaf. A ton of decaf. Even decaf, in that quantity, had trace amounts of "caf." He got pumped. His mind hurdled a series of negatives he'd laid out for himself. His confidence was like a new-ish set of elbow pads. Or maybe hurdling shoes.

The van arrived. Guy with Bell's palsy. They ran the yellows. He sat, name-tagged, under the tangerine lights of a Ramada Inn conference room. Everything was obstructed-view. A beehiver doled out Pepperidge Farm goldfish in a corner. Flat Sprite. His turn came suddenly.

Example:

A Bay Area rock band whose ex-lead singer is named Steve.

He rang his bell. His smile hurt his cheeks. He owned this trivia.

Still, he thought of her the whole time. Her auburn hair, which she would sweep around in the back before throwing it over one shoulder. Her faint panty line, visible beneath her khakis, tapered sexily.

He rang his bell again. Correct answer.

Now, she'd cooled off. The friendship—whatever—was a touch rocky. The situation with her made him morose. Not morose enough to lose, though. He buried his competition.

They sent him to Hollywood. The beds were lumpy or maybe just foreign. Maybe people liked it that way. Maybe there was a healing element to it. The quilt, glazed lightly with an industrial flame-retardant, gnawed his skin.

He listened near the window for beach noises. It was February. He heard only a hooker, perhaps, dissatisfied with her cheesesteak. Whooping cough.

He rode the elevator downstairs. Everything was a brass and pastel train wreck. No one would speak to him. No one acknowledged why he was in Tinseltown in the first place. They were probably just busy.

He wandered down a paneled corridor. Watercolors of seagulls. He passed a moist tile wall, discreetly took his jeans off—hung them on a hook and disappeared into the sauna with his thoughts.

"Auburn hair is for liars," he whispered. Felt a lump in his throat, then scolded himself. He'd unplugged his answering machine in a fit of rage before he left. He had zero messages. No possibility for messages. He groaned softly.

Upstairs, he took deep breaths. Ordered turkey clubs, drank a familiar light beer. The TV set underperformed inside a faux-wood entertainment center. He delved into the unfamiliar topography of the LA sports page. Clusters of horse results deviated from what he normally expected.

Shortly after dawn, he rose, put on his rumpled clothes, and went immediately to the concierge with a misshapen stack of ones. Turned it into a pile of quarters. Plugged the quarters into a pay phone. Called her work number. She should have already been there for two hours.

He was panicky, certain she woke up next to some new dude, one who didn't don a bib and eagerly lap up her bullshit. Sunlight coming through her bedroom curtains across their naked bodies. "Groovy Kind of Love" came through a speaker in the ceiling above the phone.

A coworker answered. "She's not here yet."

He hung up and walked back to the elevators. He was positive she was eloping with the new dude. Kip Landry called. The limo would pick him up the following morning at 8 AM sharp. He took his quarters and went back down to pay phones. Five rings.

"Andrea speaking."

"It's me."

"Who's me?"

"I'm out here for the game show."

"Yeah? You should be studying, not wasting your time with me," she chided him.

"I know, but you're special," he said.

"Les?"

"The kissing was— "

"Really cool."

"Yeah."

"Only right now, it feels weird. We should wait. Hold off."

"Until when?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe never."

He sighed.

"I do miss you, though."

"I miss you, too. I guess I can't blame you. You did say something about leaving your options open."

"I did?" She paused. "I did."

"Yeah. All I am saying is I'm happy to be an option. I don't have to be the option."

"Uh, OK."

"Did you sleep with someone last night?" He blurted. "It's OK if you did."

"Jesus," she sighed. "Downer."

The limo picked him up. "All ready, Frankie Boy?" The driver leered over the backseat.

"I'm Les."

"Less than what?"

"What?"

"Good luck."

The limo dropped him off in front of a heinous-looking commercial building on

Wilshire Boulevard. A building where you tell a social worker something. Someone's been touching you. Someone's been threatening you. Fred Fredrickson took him down to a basement.

"I'm Les," he said.

"No shit," Fredrickson said.

They passed by what seemed like a quarter mile of doors that opened into little studios, packed with people. Bells and whistles. Cheering. Booing. Hooing.

"Sit tight," Fredrickson said. Nodded towards a row of waiting-room-type chairs. Les shrugged and sat down. Thumbed anxiously through a *People*.

Fredrickson returned a half hour later. "Quick question. You single?"

"Not really. I'm pretty involved with a gal back home," he said. Reached for his wallet, figured he might need photographic proof.

"Not necessary." Fredrickson held up a palm. "Lemme ask you something. You had fun since you've been here?"

"Sure. I guess so," Les said, chuckled. He wanted to be envisioned as a team player. A contestant who arrived, won, elevated the whole goddamn franchise.

"Yeah," Fredrickson said. "So here's the bad news. You can't be on the show show."

"The show show?"

"Yeah. You, uh, looking at your scores? You're too good. The competition isn't there."

"Good."

"Not good. We need more drama, less in the way of clean sweeps. View this as a compliment."

"I'll sit it out a day or two."

"Let's take a new direction," Fredrickson suggested. "Ever hear of *Set Me Up*? It's a dating show. Want in?"

"Huh? I said I'm taken."

"Sure you are." Fredrickson nodded, pursed his lips. He handed Les an envelope with $1,000 in it.

"I don't get it."

"Les, you're Dale. From Covina. We'll do a little hair and makeup. You love Datsun 280-Zs. Clean pools for a living."

"I think I'd rather—"

"Christ." Fredrickson dug into his pocket. "Here's another $500. Do the show. You're here for a date. That's all. You won't get picked. Just be yourself. Be Dale."

"I'm Les."

"Les, be yourself. Be Dale, too."

Les looked at the money. "Are you sure?"

"Les," Fredrickson explained. "Your friends? Family? They'll never know. The makeup will be that good. Tell 'em we had a small fire here. We couldn't shoot anything in the way of trivia."

"Shit."

"That's the wrong attitude, Les."

"OK."

"We gotta bend the rules when need be. And today, according to Lasky, they need bending."

"Who's Lasky?"

"Never mind."

"Fine. I'm Dale."

"Nice to meet you. Now get down to 8H and ask for Lorna."

Les wandered down to 8H with his $1,500 tucked into his jacket. Lorna smushed her cashmered D-cups in his face while he sat in the chair. She moussed his hair. Put some shitty glasses on him. A shirt whose pattern resembled how a mentally retarded person might attempt to explain a tornado.

He got abused, then dismissed. Put out in the garage on a rope like a golden retriever with a faulty bladder.

"You look like a real tool now," Lorna said. "Even more than when you came in."

He went on set. The lights got hot. He was on TV, or at least, well, taping.

"Dale is from Covina," the announcer said, "And Dale likes, Dale? It says here you like walnuts. Becky? Whaddaya think of that?"

"Boring." The grubby voice came from behind a soft purple curtain. "I'm so not getting moist." The crowd yukked.

"Yowza," said the host.

"I drive a 280-Z," Les said.

"It's still his turn?" Becky asked. "I wanna know if there's a black guy."

"Sorry Dale," said the host.

The permed organist closed his eyelids behind his peach-lensed eyeglasses. A tuba sound effect flozzled. Les sat there and got picked on by all the other bachelors.

"I can assure you I am no Dale," one said.

Fred Fredrickson came up to him afterwards. Patted his jacket a little too hard. "Can you give me that extra $500 back?"

"Wait. We had a deal."

"Actually, we found you a cheaper flight home. Antonio took the liberty of getting your stuff from the hotel. He'll take you to LAX now."

Les was excited, briefly, that he'd see her sooner. Then he remembered he was being sent home, as not even a loser. But as a non-competitor. He got abused, then dismissed. Put out in the garage on a rope like a golden retriever with a faulty bladder.

Fredrickson patted him down. "Soooo... it's not like you'll need the extra cash, anyway."

"Oh."

"And I'm not technically supposed to be doing this, but I have a nice parting gift. Miubutti his and hers watches. An over-$1,000 value."

"Lemme see."

He handed them over. Velvet bags. "Lasky says no hard feelings."

They were clunky in a good way. Big and gold. "The timepiece of today's CEOs," a tiny card read. Les felt maybe he could spring the ladies' watch on her. Even if she blew him off, people would always remember the matching Miubuttis. "Les gave that to ya," they'd say.

The more he looked at them, the more they said commitment. Love sans boundary. Or he could maybe sell them, too.

The ride to the airport was quick.

"So you blew it, huh, Frankie?" The driver asked.

"Shut up," Les said palming the velvet bags.

"Wanna walk?"

"No."

On the flight home, Les drank a couple of beers. He got up, went into the airplane's tiny rest room. It reeked of chemicals, sour farts. He looked in the mirror, issued forth the ladies' Miubutti. "A token," he said, gestured. He said it again. Worked on the gesture. Then went back to his seat. Waited to land.

JEFF JOHNSON

What was the first thought that led to this story?
A guy who really wants to be in love.
How long did it take to write it?
I don't know.
OK. Who is the best novelist ever?
I think many of the novelists now are near the top, writing those imaginative what-if stories where FDR could secretly walk and also had a time machine and went back and stabbed Rembrandt in the throat with a crucifix made of wicker. Or when a lawyer starts writing really good books about lawyering their way into the White House then accidentally suffocating a young intern on a private plane and letting their gambling-addicted friend come in and sweep up all of the pieces.
And who is the best living novelist now?
The best living novelist will be the person who writes a slash-fiction story about kidnapping Mallard Fillmore and fattening him up, then turning his liver into foie gras and using it as lube to make love to his creator in the ass.
Jesus Christ, Jeff.

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Eileen Myles

Vice: What were you like as a teenager?
Eileen: *Like lots of kids, I had a private life that was composed of* Mad *magazine,* Twilight Zone *episodes, sci-fi novels, and some books that seemed sort of smart, like* Brave New World. *Then I got to college and there were all these remarkable people who were talking about things like "reality" and "illusion." I was just floored.*
You hadn't really thought about stuff that was so serious yet?
Only to the extent that things appeared in science fiction. Or girls staying up late talking about weird stuff. Fantasy. Heaven and hell and stuff.
The unknown.
Totally the unknown.

TAPESTRY

Rose was number one. Fairly light hair on a warm young mound. Later I knew this poet from Boston, and he lived in a loft in Little Italy with a girl who made art. Their life seemed perfect. And she was number two—I got her. She was like a welder or something, though she was small. Not tiny, but slight. Not really skinny, but normal looking, beautiful. She was a little beaky, but with beautiful breasts. We started pal-ing around. She admired my straight-leg jeans and Chinese shoes, immediately she got the same. When I think of our friendship we are walking in the rain, getting the toes of our shoes wet in puddles. After they broke up she quietly called and wanted to hang out. I couldn't believe that I was soon taking her pants down on my bed. She liked to drink booze. I remember her smiling face looking down into a glass with about an inch of whiskey. She wore glasses. She took them off and she was hot. Clits were all different. Hers was larger. All rubbery, more like porn. I had seen a pussy like hers before but not so close. It was like a lip going vertical. I mean, if you had your head right there. It was kind of a lippy trail, actually this is not her clit, it's her labia I'm describing, what I used to describe as a little girl my gum. Outer gum. Hers was a very uncomplicated female and large, a red road to a small swollen button. I kept thinking I can't believe she feels this way about me. She came over to do this. I put my two fingers on the spot and rubbed. I have always been an unpredictable masturbator, spending hours for naught. Getting huge, and then having to go out in pain. Then I'll touch myself for a second in a public toilet (New York Public Library, always great) and the walls of the world cave in. So I was just kind of scrubbing away, moving her jelly part, not the button itself the way it hangs, it wiggling sits. She groaned. It was a teeny way she sounded when she looked at art, but this was a deeper older oh. She was a woman. One by one the women I knew who seemed to be girls, or men, or just strangers—when all their muscles tensed then released, and they said oh it was like the deepest voice they had. Like the secret room behind all the other apartments now connected to mine. This oh. I didn't think of it then, but I think of it now, all the guy poets' fake ohs. Next to this one so female and true. Is that what man wants to do? O Brazil. O New York. O Poetry! Just let me come like her. She got mad. You can stop. I mean I sort of knew, but I wasn't sure. Between women if you're having sex, you've got to be sure. And slowly that's where you live. Who wouldn't give up being in a whole lot of shitty poetry magazines for this. Chris had rough black hair on her crotch. It got rougher when she drank all the time. I began to think of her pussy as an animal. We tended its coat. I was always willing to have sex with her, but I liked it better when she was pretty and clean. One woman was told by a lover that she had a fat cooch. It was true—her outer lips were pillowy and fat. Full. Her inner lips were regulation healthy and her clit—it was a small red little spud. It was however guardian of one of the most avid pussies I've ever known. Not the biggest, but damn the most willing, most sporting. I fucked her once for ten hours straight. She puked and she wanted to continue. I would never be allowed to sleep. I was hallucinating. I used this hand, then that. Fingers individually, in groups and my whole fucking hand, again and again. I used my dick. It was a nice fat boy, rather featureless which at the time seemed correct, a white guy who appeared out of the fly of my overalls, I was being a farmer boy and when she felt it wagging between my legs as I bent over her in front of a fire, her eyes lit up. Thanks to the fire I was able to see this glory. She told me that she landed in a hospital once because she had urged her boyfriend to fuck her while she was hanging out a 23rd-story window of a huge apartment building in Manhattan. Apparently this high-intensity fucking caused some kind of lump in the walls of her vagina and she wound up in the hospital where she learned something or other that was sad.

But she was in there for fucking. I mean that's pretty good. There was a small woman who had a lacy-looking pussy that she hated. There was like this frottage over her clit. Instead of a hood it had a large mantilla. She wasn't the kind of woman who could laugh at her puss. It made her sick what she considered her irregularity, the wave of skin that dangled between her legs. I would have told her it was pretty if she let me. It was unique. She was not a girl even slightly about letting, allowing, suffering anything at all. She had levels of protection like the shaft of an elevator. She was way up there somehow, unknown but looking down like a little girl incredibly mean who could issue commands. After her orgasms, screaming ugh. Then I met a woman who described her clit as a monster. There is nearly no woman who regards her pussy as normal. I remember seeing a pussy I recognized on the back outside cover of an art magazine. It was like it was supposed to be a big secret whose pussy it was. I mean they didn't say her name underneath though they did give you the name of the photographer which was kind of a hint. But then everyone said oh yeah, you saw the picture of blank's pussy, like everyone was really in on it. But I recognized the pussy. I actually knew her tits better than her pussy, because her tits were that kind that are indented, the tip of the nipple goes in, not out. Which is incredibly common, or else coincidentally I had two such breasts (or girlfriends) back to back which made me think it

Illustration by Milano Chow

Photo by Laurel Nakadate

must be common. The first one's did look odd to me. I can't imagine what straight women do, going through life only being looked at by men and doctors. At some point you always have to have a frank conversation about the tits or the puss or the ass. If you live with her you have it day in and day out. Maybe men do this too. The girl I described as extraordinarily hungry—she in fact regarded her puss with the same enthusiastic love as any other part of her, perhaps that was her oddity (to me). Her pussy was no more special than her fingertips or cheek. Sexually she was entirely alive, so neither liked nor disliked her clit, it was her. It was the whole rest of the world she had a problem with, so it was great she had this gift, her wonderful successful body. The woman who regarded hers as monstrous nonetheless is entirely addicted to hers. I was too. The tiny shelf of skin I slipped my tongue and finger alongside of, it's like the backside of a rubber duck. And so I knew my sweet toy's edges in the dark quietly going to sleep with ducky in mind. The hood of it was slick, so she had a small cap between her legs a bullet of pleasure and power. Even after she had one of her outrageous sunset orgasms which she details while still basking in its immense succulent corona slowly with an utterly generous and female smile on her face, a satisfied smile and kind, she urges me to put my finger on her secret fingertip and feel the blood pump as the pleasure is ebbing away. She's always ready for a nap and then to go again. She's always just finding it. Every time we fuck she forgets that it's ever been that great before. Her eyes are closed and she proclaims that never, never before has she experienced anything to even remotely approach what that felt like. Does sex ever feel like this for a man. Does his tree change and spout. Does his system get up, does he go. I once was laying in bed with her and she got me off just by touching and I am still sinking backward in that picture, a morning in which I lie in bed looking out the window at a passing train.

EILEEN MYLES

This piece is an excerpt from the forthcoming The Inferno / a poet's novel.

So… why pussy?

I don't know. It seems like every female artist at some point does, you know, pussy photographs. And it's like, is that beautiful or is that horrendous? There's such a diversity of opinion about the female… genitals—outside of their use. That's agreed upon.

It's true.

And I'd never seen a female writer do just like a procession of beaver shots. So I said, "I'm just gonna do pussy wallpaper."

Is it based on, you know, real people?

It's many people. Many different real people.

Tibor Fischer

Vice: When did you start writing?
Tibor: *I was always writing bits and pieces, even when I was a teenager. I suppose I started doing it seriously when I was 28.*
Why so late?
I worked as a journalist out in Hungary from 1988 to '90 for all the big changes at that time. After all that was over, I sort of came back to London expecting to find a job. For various reasons, I couldn't. I was sort of sitting at home feeling sorry for myself, but I was lucky because I had some money saved up. It occurred to me that if I didn't really settle down and make a serious attempt to write a novel... Well, you know.
No, what?
Well, I'd done journalism but that wasn't what interested me. So that's when I sat down and wrote my first novel, Under the Frog.

CRUSHED MEXICAN SPIDERS

Ahead of her, struggling up the stairs strugglingly was a mother and pushchair, laden with bags and a screaming kid. Homebound workers salmoned past without offering a hand, blinkered by visions of supper or respite.

The comatose staff of London Underground didn't think of helping the mother. She wouldn't be helping either. Ten years ago when she had moved to London, she would have. Imperceptibly but perceptibly the city toxified you. Parking across strangers' driveways, not saying thank you when a door was held open for you, murder. Somehow it got you.

London informed you that you got nothing for a lifetime of decency; not a free glass of water. Not that behaving badly necessarily got you anywhere, but it was generally easier and more fun; and finally any career criminal from Albania or genocidist from Rwanda passing through London got the same medical treatment as you and better housing rights.

You didn't want to become the sort of person who didn't help an entoiled mother, but you became one. No one had helped her when she had needed it. And now her help muscles had withered away. Single mothers were especially annoying because of their dishonesty. Very few of them could hack it. They either leeched off friends and family, sucking in services and cash, or they botched it up, while maintaining how coping they were.

Outside, on the pavement, a Portuguese junkie was kneeling while a buxom exorcist wielding a Bible intoned with two backup entreaters and sprinkled him with holy water.

Sidestepping the adjuration she threaded her way through the clumps of beggars, drug dealers, thugs, and seething commuters that made up Brixton. She ran walking. To get home was all she wanted. The strength of the desire was almost alarming.

She had thought about getting out. She had been thinking about little else. And she hadn't just thought about it. Job applications. She was convinced she had sent more job applications than any other human being. They had failed. She had written more. They had failed.

Then, while she would have been happy leaving London, her boyfriend couldn't. Harun worked as a junior information officer at the Turkish Embassy, and just as he was coming to the end of his tour of duty, after three years, when she had been counting on escape, teaching English and getting a tan and a family, they had split up. She knew you couldn't have everything. Harun farted a lot and always had to be infallible on international affairs, but had a sense of humor and was punctual. Now she was again at the mercy of London's nightlife.

What was a night out in London? Pleading your way into a club, past an earpiece which had grown a moron. Once inside you had to fight to get served, and then your money went as if you were surrendering it to bandits. She had only managed to get the deposit on her flat because of her inheritance from her grandmother. Her grandmother hadn't been well off, but she hadn't been one for drinking, smoking, eating much, buying much, going to the cinema or indeed anywhere. She played bridge with old friends and was of a generation that worked or starved.

Everywhere she went, on holiday or on business, was better. Dublin, Copenhagen, Istanbul, St. Ives, St. Petersburg, Palermo. You name it, it was an improvement. You'd walk into a shop and the proprietor would say hello instead of assessing how much you would be attempting to steal. Everyone she knew talked of leaving London. Somewhere calmer. Somewhere greener. Somewhere sunnier. Somewhere else.

As she approached her house, she could see the lights on in the ground-floor flat that belonged to Gloria. Gloria, who had a doctorate on the subject of slums in poor countries, and whose flat reflected that. Her parents paid the bills, and Gloria had sex, noisily, with embarrassed men who were never seen more than twice.

In the basement flat were the Cooks. An elderly couple who had been living there for forty years; they effortlessly annihilated all the myths about the nobility of the white working class. They were sullen, smelly, fans of any manifestation of ugliness. Living in shit was evidently no problem for them, since they did nothing about the rubbish amassed, shin-high, in front of their door. For the first year she had greeted them, and been ignored. Twice, clandestinely, disgusted by the filth, she had gathered up the debris around their door. But then she gave up. Londoned.

The first floor was Rolf. An old, failed actor who lived on his own, he never had friends dropping by, because he was a bedridden inconsiderate miserabilist: A bedridden inconsiderate miserabilist, however, who had been an inconsiderate miserabilist long before he was bedridden. Yet he would never be one of those pensioners discovered long after the arrival of decomposition, because he was too unpleasant. A file of social workers shambled up to his flat, grimacing but reliable.

When she had moved in she had listened politely to Rolf's stories of being stranded in Ethiopia, playing third lackey in a film that had run out of finance, and explaining why he had to keep a pool table in the hallway, a full-size one that made it difficult for the other residents to get past.

Illustration by Milano Chow

In his favor Rolf was at least under her flat. His bathroom regularly flooded Gloria's flat, but he wouldn't do anything effective about it. It was fascinating how you could not care at all about others and still be cared for. One summer when she had worked at a giant campsite in Normandy she had noticed how the decent customers got the nightmarish reps and how the decent reps got the nightmarish customers. Invariably the nightmarish reps never got the nightmarish customers any more than the decent reps got the decent customers.

Then, up on the second floor, she saw traces of light in her flat. Even though she assumed she must have left a light on in the morning when she left, she couldn't suppress a creep of anxiety. This was a city where everything was done to guarantee the liberty of burglars.

Although no one was watching her, or would be able to make her out in the dark, she felt ridiculous as she fumbled with the key in the top lock. The lock had never given her grief before, but no matter how many times she slipped the key in, it refused to turn. After several minutes of failure, it occurred to her that the locks must have been changed, so persistent was the lack of turning. Had there been a burglary during the day? If the locks had been changed why wasn't there a note? She chose to ring Gloria's bell to see what was going on.

Over the intercom, a male voice answered.

"Good evening," she asked. "Is Gloria there, please?"

"No Gloria here."

Had Gloria moved out? Gloria had been in the house when she moved in, but they had never got on. She had first met Gloria 15 minutes after she had magazined one unbelievably large hairy spider and given another unbelievably large hairy spider a taste of the 966 pages of the telephone directory. She had been agitated, because they were too big to be London spiders.

"I'm Gloria. You haven't seen two largish spiders have you?" Gloria, it transpired, bred spiders. She had always thought it was blank males who collected exotic or venomous creatures to make themselves more interesting or to feel powerful because they had one of the only five Armored Mist frogs in the world stashed under their bed, as one suitor in a pub had recounted to her.

She had directed Gloria to the spider paste. "Kelvin. Melvin," Gloria had obituarized. "I let them out for exercise," she explained when asked how they had escaped. The hatred that Gloria had launched had been quite unjustified and unbalanced and relations hadn't much improved.

"Have the locks been changed?' she asked. "I'm in the second-floor flat and I can't get in."

"No one's changed the locks." The male voice insisted.

"Could you let me in please?"

"I don't know who you are." There was a receiver-replacing conversation-terminating clack on the intercom. She pressed the other buttons, but no one responded. In the darkness she could just perceive that the names by the buzzers on the intercom looked different, but she couldn't make out the letters. She wondered what to do. Wait for someone to go in or come out? Call for a locksmith? It was cold.

As she wandered out into the driveway, she looked back up at her flat and she saw a woman at the window looking down at her. Shocked, she didn't quite know how to react. The interloper was a woman at the wrong end of middle age, unlikely to be a burglar, but very possibly mentally ill. The interloper was unfazed, observing her for a few moments before slowly retreating to the inner reaches of the flat.

She hit her own buzzer: "Who are you?"

"Sorry?"

"What are you doing in my flat?"

"I don't know who you're looking for, but this is the second-floor flat.'

"I know. I've lived in it for seven years."

"No. I've lived here for seven years."

"If you don't let me in, I'll call the police."

"If you don't go away, I'll call the police."

"This has gone far enough."

"This has gone far enough. If it's your flat why is it that I'm in here and you're out there?" Another conversation-terminating clack.

Was this some elaborate practical joke? Television chicanery? She looked around for concealed chucklers. If it were a joke, she would exact terrible revenge. She retrieved her phone from her bag, but, to top it all, it wouldn't work. Gagging with rage she strode over to the nearest pay phone and called the police. After hanging on for several minutes, she explained that someone was in her flat. She then paced up and down in the driveway for 20 minutes, past the orange bathtub that had been there for months and which, certainly, would be there for months to come. Eventually the police shot past with the sirens going. A few minutes later, they drove back and stopped in her driveway.

Two police officers emerged from the car with that caution police officers exhibit in case someone starts shooting at them. One was a policewoman who must have been the result of some equal-opportunity mania, almost a dwarf, tubby, and with a look that said she couldn't believe she had been accepted for the job. The other was a towering, wall-wide veteran to whom she re-explained her predicament.

The police drew down the woman in her flat. Her name was Mrs. Gardiner. Her name was inscribed by the bell. Mrs. Gardiner swiftly produced correspondence from utility companies that enthroned her as the rightful occupant. The mystery man from the ground-floor flat maintained Mrs. Gardiner had been living there for years. They went upstairs to the flat—Rolf's pool table vanished—where her claim that the curtains in the back bedroom were red was proved wrong. All her belongings were gone. The flat had been totally redecorated, refurnished.

She was asked to provide any evidence that she lived there. She could have sworn she had a letter from her bank in her bag, but it was gone. Mrs. Gardiner now studied her with the compassion reserved for the mentally ill who have just done something awful to themselves. The policeman couldn't have been more sympathetic as tears bunched in her eyes.

'I'd like to help," said the policeman. "But you see how it looks. This lady has proof of residence. You don't. Your keys don't fit any of the locks. The neighbors say they've never seen you before. Are you on some medication?"

Mrs. Gardiner commented, "She needs help."

The rage and the weariness made her leave. She couldn't bear to see how they looked at her. She didn't know what to do. She walked over to the nearby newsagent run by a barely counter-high Asian woman who greeted her.

"You know me, don't you?"

"Of course," the newsagent replied, but as soon as she replied she realized that she would have said the same thing to a complete stranger.

"Do you know what's going on over the road?"

"What's going on over the road? Something's always going on over there."

Mechanically she started walking toward the underground. She'd deal with this tomorrow. Stay with someone tonight and get on the case tomorrow, but none of her friends lived in the area. She tried her phone again: Still not working. Stopping at the only working payphone, she tried her friends. The first attempts produced no reply. Then when she phoned Don, who was almost the last person on whose sofa she'd consider sleeping, a non-Don voice answered.

"Could I speak to Don?"

"You've got a wrong number."

She punched the number again, extremely slowly to make sure she got it right, but only got the non-Don voice.

She took the tube back into Victoria and went into the first OK-looking cheap hotel. All she wanted to do was curl up. The receptionist ran her credit card and then announced it was no good. With only a few pounds in cash, she went out to the cashpoint on the corner, and after she had tapped in her number three times, the machine ate her card.

It was now gone 11 and she took stock of how badly she stank. She made another round of phone calls. The numbers were unavail-

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Stephen Dixon

Vice: How did you get started writing?

Stephen: *I was a newsman in D.C. when I was 22 years old, and I was drinking a lot at night. I had nothing to do and no friends, but I wanted to do something. I sat down and wrote my first story, and it was a great feeling. So the next evening I wrote another. Pretty soon I had thirteen or fifteen stories. My brother Jimmy was a writer, and he came to town and I showed them to him. He took a look and he said, "A couple of these are pretty good, but you've got to finish." That's when I knew.*

I heard from someone that you get annoyed with smaller presses that sort of act like they've rediscovered you…

That's not true. I'm appreciative. To me, publishing is philanthropy for the writer, because books don't make money. One time a book of mine did earn a publisher some money… But no, in fact I like small presses better, if anything, just because they seem to work harder.

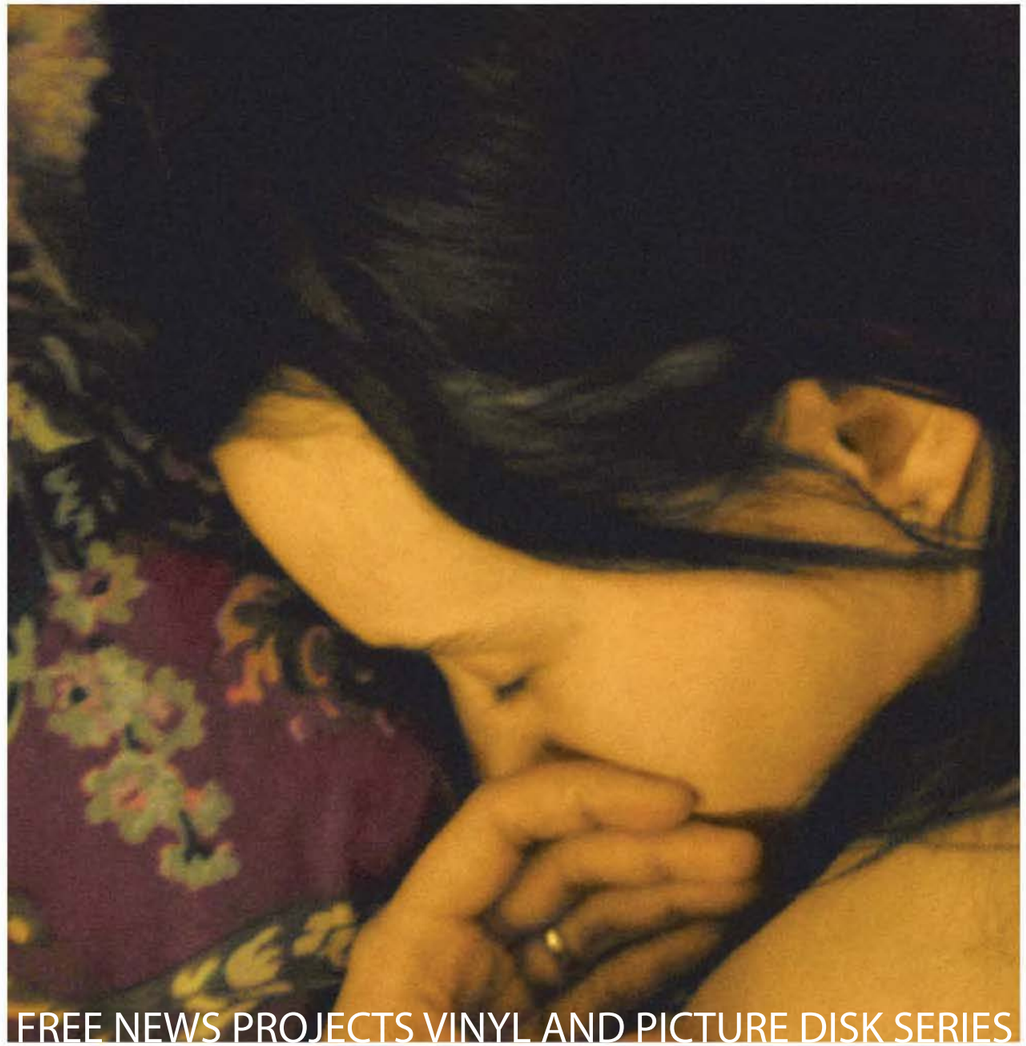
NAKEDNESS

He thinks: She sees him through the kitchen window taking off his clothes to put in the washer. It's night, past 12; his wife's in bed, going to sleep. Their young neighbor, who lives by herself since she got divorced a year ago, shares a driveway with them till it goes past their house and only goes to hers. He thinks: He's taking off his clothes, first the shirt, then the sweatpants—he isn't wearing undershorts; the pants feel better without them—and his neighbor's just rolled her garbage can down the driveway to leave at the end of it for the morning trash pickup. Walking back to her house, she looks through the kitchen window—he doubts she intended to spy on him; probably just saw a light go on in the kitchen and looked that way—and saw him taking off his clothes. He'd planned to go to the bedroom naked, after he dumped the clothes into the washer, and put tomorrow's long-sleeve t-shirt over his night-table light to make it easier for his wife to fall asleep, and if she was already asleep, so the light wouldn't wake her. He'd been in the living room the last few hours, reading and drinking and napping and listening to music and for about a half hour, because his wife wanted one, trying to get a fire started with wet wood. After covering the lamp he'd planned to get into his side of the bed and read a biography he's been reading in bed the last two months, no more than five to six pages a night, when he gets too sleepy to read, and then shut the light, snuggle up to his wife, rub her buttocks if she has her back to him, her thighs if she's on her side facing him or on her back, put his hand under her nightshirt no matter which way she's facing and feel her breasts—she lets him about every other night and always, or almost, says OK if he says "All right?" or "Please?" or "Just for a few seconds," or something like "These are my sleeping pillows—I can't fall asleep without them." But tonight, in the kitchen, he turns on the light—his wife had turned it off when she went to bed—and takes off his pants and shirt and socks and puts them in the washer for tomorrow's wash. It's more than half-filled, so he knows there'll be one. He doesn't know his neighbor is watching him. He hadn't heard her drag her huge trash can down the driveway to place it, as she always does, next to his two smaller cans. If he had heard her can rolling on its wheels, he wouldn't have taken off his pants and shirt, or would have taken them off without turning on the kitchen light and dropped them into the washer with the socks. That way, since there's no light in the kitchen from the street or sky, he wouldn't have been seen. But she saw him standing in the room naked and putting the clothes in the washer and thought, Jesus, for an old guy, he hasn't got a bad body. In fact it's pretty good, almost a flat stomach and his muscles are big and hard and he's got a nice-size cock too in what looks like the relaxed position. But his body is more muscular and youthful than she ever imagined. She goes to his door. He's at the sink now standing in front of the window she saw him through, running the water and then putting a glass under the tap, filling it and drinking it down. He always has a glass of water before going to bed at night, and if he's drunk a lot of alcohol, two to three glasses of water—best way to avoid a hangover, he's found—and usually another glass in the middle of the night. She rings the kitchen doorbell. It doesn't work—hasn't for a few weeks and he knows he has to call in someone to fix it—so she then raps on the door window. He's startled, puts the glass down without drinking the second water and looks at the door. "Hi," she seems to say, and is smiling. He thinks: Is she nuts? I've nothing on, can't she see? She points to him and then to her chest and presses her hands together and holds them out flat and moves them up and down in quick motions. He looks for something to cover himself with. Dish towel hanging on the refrigerator-door handle, but it's too small. Looks at her. "Open up," she mouths, and he backs his way into his wife's study with his hands covering his genitals and shuts the door. Goes through the study to his older daughter's bedroom, out that to the hallway, to his bedroom, looks at his wife—she's sleeping—puts his bathrobe on and goes through the living room to the kitchen, hoping she still isn't there. If she is, what will he say? "I apologize for exposing myself like that, it was a complete accident, I didn't think anybody would be outside so late, but did you come to the door because something's wrong and you need help?" He unlocks the door and opens it. "Hi," she says. "Hello." "I saw you through the window there before and I have to confess something you might not want to hear, but I'm not one for holding back, so here goes…" Puts the pants, shirt, and socks in the washer, shuts the light, turns the light on in the dining room and lowers the thermostat to 66, shuts the light and goes into the hallway bathroom and looks in the medicine-chest mirror. My body, he thinks—God, it's become so old. I'm always controlling how much I eat, haven't had a slice of bread for weeks so I can lose weight and haven't eaten desserts in months and never ate much of them and drink lots of water—couple of quarts a day, maybe—to fill me up, and I still have an ugly paunch. Can't be the water. Has to be something to do with age—the body going through some natural settling. And my chest. I go to the Y four or five times a week and exercise for an hour or so on the weight machines and stationary bike and though my arms are muscular and hard, bigger than they were when I got married, my chest sags like an old man's. Where'd that strange fantasy with Vicki come from? Never thought of her before in that way, and I know she'd never act like that. What could I have been thinking that a woman so young would be attracted to my body, admire my cock, would be anything but repulsed or simply turned off seeing me naked? Sandra's never said anything about the changes in my body, the chest hair and

Continued on pg. 114

Illustration by Milano Chow

FAVOURITE SONS



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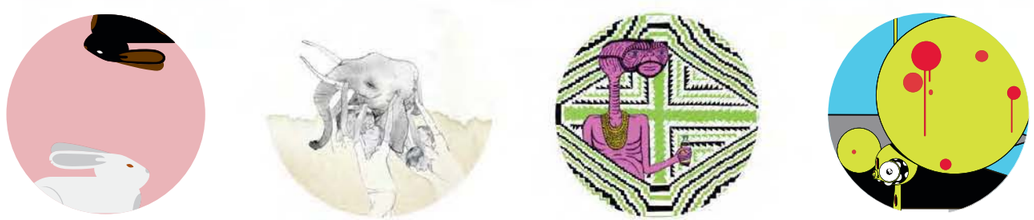

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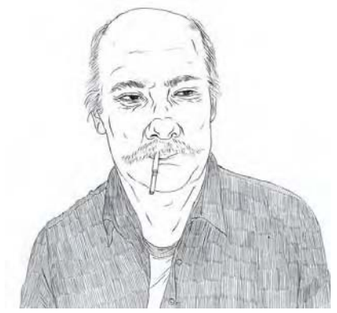


Charles Willeford

***We talked with Don Herron, a friend of Willeford's and the author of the biography* Willeford.**

Vice: How did Willeford get started writing?
Don: *He was stationed at Hamilton Air Force Base as a supply sergeant, and he was always talking about what he was going to do. He'd written a collection of poems, and he'd talk about the novels he was going to write, his theories about writing, and his admiration for Proust. Well, one day, one of these fellows goes, "Will you shut up? You're never gonna write anything." The gauntlet was thrown down. Willeford rented a room at the Powell Hotel that weekend, and he went there every weekend after that. That's how he wrote his first novel.*
Who were his favorite writers?
He'd read anything; he didn't care if it was "literary." His favorite was Kafka. He had a complete set. But then he'd have Phillip K. Dick paperbacks lying around.
What was he like in person?
Friendly, funny—he was incredibly good socially. Of course, this was something he'd worked on—he joined Toastmasters and learned how to do public speaking. The only thing he disliked was someone who wasn't socially adept.
Did he have any tics or things he said all the time?
He said "You know" all the time. He was like a valley girl or something.

From A GUIDE FOR THE UNDEHEMORRHOIDED

In hospital language a patient does not urinate, micturate, pee, piss, or take a leak. He voids. Or, as in my case, he is unable to void.

Hospital jargon is mid-Victorian. My hemorrhoids were not chopped out, hacked away, or operated upon. Instead, my asshole was dilated and debrided. There is no sex talk in a hospital either. Sex organs, male and female, when they are mentioned at all, are discussed formally, as elimination tools; nor is there, apparently, any distinction made between toilets for men and women. Whoever gets inside first has possession, and then there are no locks on the doors. If the doors were labeled, one suspects they would be called "Necessary Rooms," the euphemism for the toilets of our Gilded Age.

Several years ago, before I ever thought of entering a hospital, a friend told me that a nurse's aide would give a man a slow handjob for five bucks. Unsurprised at the time, I filed the information away, thinking I might be able to use it in a novel someday. I have been sorry since that I failed to press my friend for details. On the disinterested outside, I had no reason to disbelieve him. But on the inside, watching these harried, grimly smiling nurses aides—probably the lowest-IQ occupational group of employees in the nation—rushing about inefficiently, but earning every cent of their $2.40 an hour, I wondered vaguely about how my friend had gone about getting his slow handjob. He would have had to draw them a picture. However, discounting the denseness of the nurse's aides' understanding, the lack of privacy, the hospital stench, and the permeating reek of indignant death—these factors in combination—drove all thoughts of and about sex from my mind during the two weeks of my stay.

My friend, I believe, now, lied to me.

On the morning they brought the old man into the four-bed ward to die, I was trying to void, straining slightly at irregular intervals, right hand holding my limp cock, my left holding the clammy metal "duck" beneath a covering sheet. And at ten AM, when they brought the old man in to die, I had been engaged in this heroic project for about 12 hours. Three packs of cigarettes, six minutes for each three-cent cigarette, had gone up in smoke, and the pressure on my bladder was intolerable. Any moment I expected the distended membrane to burst inside me like a wickedly pricked balloon which, in turn, would bloat me terribly with uremic poisoning, sudden death, and a happy release at last from suffering. Such was my fervent hope. A filled bladder can, or at least has been known to, burst after only eight swollen hours. At the 12-hour mark, I knew that I was literally tolerating the intolerable.

The young blue-eyed intern who supervised the transfer of the old man from the wheeled cart to the bed across from mine winked at me and said, "This one ain't long for the road." The remark was callous, perhaps, but obvious. As the two black orderlies, assisted by two nurse's aides, unrolled the tiny old man from the citron sheets (bright yellow sheets belonged to the emergency admission ward downstairs) onto the white bed, I nodded in agreement. The old-timer was as small as a 12-year-old child. His bony arms and legs were as thin and yellow as No. 2 pencils, and his wrinkled saffron skin was as scaly and scruffy as damp canary copy paper.

A long orange rubber catheter hose was wrapped around his left leg, which needed some disentangling, and it terminated in a square, orange-colored urine receptacle which was placed on the floor beneath his bed. His white hair was plentiful, worn roached back from his forehead, and his heavy, bristle-stiff moustache matched his hair exactly. His fierce black eyes were recessed for fully an inch beneath his bony, shaggy white brows; his high-arched nose was regally aquiline and his false teeth had been removed for his comfort. His darting black tongue, together with his upturned chin and arching nose, gave the old man the appearance of a subdued but predatory hawk. As he raised a long skinny arm above his head, his curled fleshless fingers were like hairy talons feeling for a foothold on a tree branch.

He wore a blue pajama jacket, piped in royal blue, but not the trousers, and a pair of white silk socks with embroidered black clocks. It had been several years since I had seen a pair of "clock sox," although I remembered a time when they were considered the height of elegance.

Over and over without pause, the old man repeated "Aie aie aie aie aie…" in a deep-throated whisper. I surmised that this wistful cry of pain had been continued over such a long period of time that the sounds no longer reached his conscious mind—the way an old, deaf dog barks sometimes, until one gently closes his mouth for him, because he cannot hear the barking.

One of the nurse's aides removed the clock sox. The old man's feet were as blue as the piping on his pajama jacket.

"Better put 'em back on," her companion said. "His feet are probably cold."

Yes, I thought to myself, Socrates himself said that the cold began with his feet.

The small ward suddenly filled with people as the intern finished the transfer and started out with the cart and the bundle of soiled yellow sheets. There was the regular day nurse, who issued the pills, a heavy-lipped, heavy-legged, heavy-eyelidded Cuban nurse, who spoke beautiful English and performed as an interpreter; and the two busy nurse's aides. Others crowded in: The Franciscan priest, an aged white-robed nun, two 30ish Cuban women (the old man's daughter and his sister-in-law), and their husbands, dignified young men in their 30s, with blond curly hair and pale blue eyes, both wearing work shirts and jeans.

"Tell him," the nun said to the Cuban nurse, "tell him to say, over and over again, 'Forgive me, O Lord, for all my sins.' It will make him feel better."

"Should he say it in Spanish or in English?" the Cuban nurse asked, and quite seriously, too.

"Either way," the nun said impatiently. "It doesn't make any difference."

"Aie aie aie aie aie aie…" the old man whispered hoarsely.

"Ask him," the nun said, "if he knows the Little Joseph prayer."

The Cuban nurse put the question to the old man in Spanish.

"Aie aie aie aie aie aie…" the old man whispered.

"He knows it, I'm sure he does," the old nun said to the Cuban nurse. "Just tell him to keep saying it over and over. It will make him feel better."

In Spanish, the Cuban nurse relayed the instructions.

"Aie aie aie aie aie aie…" the old man replied.

A laboratory technician arrived with his little box of test tubes and siphoned off a blood sample from the old man's skinny left arm. I was surprised to see the black blood in the glass tube. The nurse's aide returned with a glass of orange juice, and for the rites, the priest pulled the curtains closed around the old man's bed.

I could hear the mumbling of the priest behind the green curtains, faint "aie"s from the old man, and occasional softly spoken phrases in Spanish from the Cuban nurse. The ancient nun, however, left the ward when the priest closed the curtains.

The daughter, her sister-in-law, and the two husbands were shut out, and they stood about awkwardly in the narrow aisle. I pointed out my metal chair to the daughter, but she shook her head and looked away from me. All of the relatives made a studied effort not to look at me, but because all of the activity had helped to keep my mind off my own problems, I would not close the curtains around my own bed. Besides, I thought, I was in the ward first; if anything, they were intruding on my privacy.

A middle-aged nurse's aide came into the ward with the mimeographed luncheon menus. She handed one to me, with a pencil, and another to the daughter.

"You'd better fill it in for him," the aide said, jerking her head toward the closed curtain. "There's two or three choices for the different meats and vegetables. Just make a check-mark beside the one he wants."

The young woman looked puzzled and distracted, although she understood the directions in English. Her husband took the sheet and pencil away from her and, with his companion (brother?), retreated to the windows to discuss the menu in Spanish. I checked off my menu, ordering apple juice, iced tea, and cream of mushroom soup. Finished, I signaled the husband and showed him my sheet. He checked off the same items for the old man and said, "Thank you." He bobbed his head and smiled with very white teeth. "Thank you very much."

"De nada," I replied. The middle-aged nurse's aide smiled at me as I handed her both menus. I had solved the problem for her.

An intern and an orderly arrived with the rack and the upturned bottle of glucose water. The priest, having finished with the rites, or whatever it was he was saying, pulled the curtains back, and the two technicians went to work on the old man. He kept lifting his skinny arm, and they finally tied the arm down to the bed rail with strips of gauze before they could get the needle into it.

The old man's doctor arrived in the ward. He glanced cursorily at his patient as the intern worked with the tube from the glucose bottle, trying to get the flow started, and shook his head. The doctor was a personification of Shell Scott: Clipped white hair, powder-blue linen suit, ocean-blue button-down shirt, with a white knit tie. He wore black-and-white oxfords, however, indicating an ambivalent personality. He was ageless, and could have been either 35 or 55, because of his deep Florida tan.

The four relatives silently crowded about him, looking with terror at his face, and he backed out of the ward as the doctor clutched his right arm and the sister-in-law grasped the coat sleeve of the left. The two men followed closely on the heels of their wives as the doctor backed to the doorway before holding his ground.

"When you took him home six weeks ago," the doctor said with an exasperated, raspy voice, pulling his arms out of the women's fingers with a backward jerk, "I told you then I couldn't do any more for him if he was my own father. Everything that can be done is being done."

The women clutched his arms again, staring up into his face, and he backed down the corridor out of my sight. "If he were my own father," he said again, "I couldn't help him."

The women returned to the ward; both of them weeping. Their husbands hovered nearby without touching them, their faces expressionless.

"He's dead now," the Cuban nurse announced suddenly in Spanish.

The husbands led their wives out of the ward. The Cuban nurse called in the two nurse's aides, who helped her remove the intravenous tube from the glucose bottle, and the two hooked tubes from his nostrils, that continued to hiss as they released oxygen. The aides, following the nurses, carried the glucose-water rack out of the ward, and for a moment I was alone with the silent old man. Two orderlies with a cart, together with the oxygen crew, arrived at about the same time. The tanks were wheeled out, and the "No Smoking" sign was peeled off the door. The orderlies rolled the old man onto the cart, covered him with a blanket, and wheeled him out. The two nurse's aides returned with clean sheets, and began to make up the bed as the Cuban nurse supervised them from the doorway.

Before they finish making up the bed, I thought to myself, setting up an arbitrary deadline, I will piss. Hurry, you do not have much time. I watched the awkward nurse's aides intently; they were putting the crisp bedspread over the clean sheets, tucking in the bottom folds with what we used to call in the Army "hospital corners"… and a tiny trickle began to flow into the aluminum duck, and then a freely flowing stream. Finally it stopped.

"Here," I said, taking the duck from beneath the sheet, and holding it up for the nurse.

She took the duck into the bathroom and measured the urine. She put the empty duck down on the bedside table and smiled with heavy lips.

"Sixty cc's, sir," she said. "That is very good."

"No hay de que," I said, shrugging, and reached for my cigarettes.

CHARLES WILLEFORD

Illustration by Milano Chow

Here's a little interview we did with Charles Willeford's widow, Betsy Willeford.

Vice: Is this story true? Did Charles Willeford really have this surgery and was he really next to a dying Cuban man?
It's all true. I had just met him then and am not the wife he refers to in the book, so I can't attest to every detail.
Why did he initially self-publish this story?
He sent it to some magazines but it was rejected because it was an awkward length. So he decided to publish a small edition himself.
How did you two meet?
We worked together on the Village Post, *a magazine in Coconut Grove.*
What was his writing routine like?
Well, he told his writing students to write a page a day before going to the bathroom. If their bladders held out, they'd have a 365-page manuscript at the end of the year.
What was he like in person?
Even better.
Thanks for talking to us. For the record, we think Charles Willeford was one of the best novelists ever, anywhere, for all time.

Fred Armisen

Vice: What about Saddam Hussein do you identify with?
Fred: *His need for love.*
Did you do much research for this piece?
I just looked at photos of Baghdad in the 70s.
Have you written much fiction before?
No.
What's the best novel ever and why?
A Confederacy Of Dunces *by John Kennedy Toole. It is relentlessly funny.*
Who is the best living fiction writer now?
Gary Larson. His stories are very short, but they are very visual.

THANK YOU FROM BAGHDAD

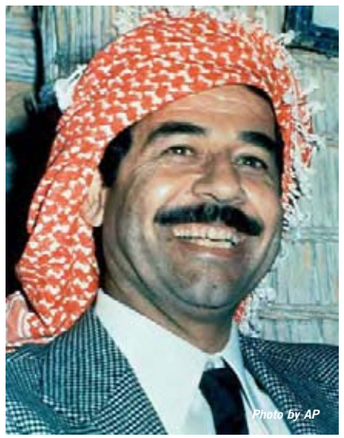
By Former Dictator of Iraq Saddam Hussein

Yesterday (I write this on 6 November 2006) I was handed my verdict in a trial that to me was more of a circus than anything else. I am not surprised by how things turned out. I knew the second I walked into that courtroom that no one was going to listen to me.

It's all right though. I get it. The judge is only trying to do his job. He's got bills to pay and a girlfriend or wife to impress I am sure. It was the same for me when I first got into power. Part of me was grateful to the citizens of Iraq for making me dictator. But another part of me was excited that this one lady I was seeing would be much more attracted to me!

Even though I am a little freaked out by what's going to happen to me, I also appreciate the amazing run I had as Iraq's supreme leader. It was an incredibly rewarding and enriching experience. I learned a lot about my beloved country and about the world. There are some people I'd like to thank. First of all, my staff. They worked so hard, often into the wee hours. Sometimes I would come in at nine in the morning to find them still there from the day before, poring over receipts and schedules. I am thankful to Anwar Zamin, my Minister of the Interior, who taught me so much when I first came into power. Before I met Anwar, I knew nothing about the many things that make a country run smoothly. Highway construction, school budgets… even laws about sanitary conditions in restaurants! Thanks to my driver Namer, who purposefully took the long way so I could sneak in some alone time before my many meetings of the day. To Manaf Hassan, the head of security: Really great work all around. You were very patient with me and my crazy hours and I don't know if I showed my appreciation.

I want to thank some people from my early days. Before my political career, before all the wars, and way before this ridiculous TV show of a trial. The first person that comes to mind is Mr. Mehhid. He owned a record store called Mehhid Music and that place made me the person that I am today.



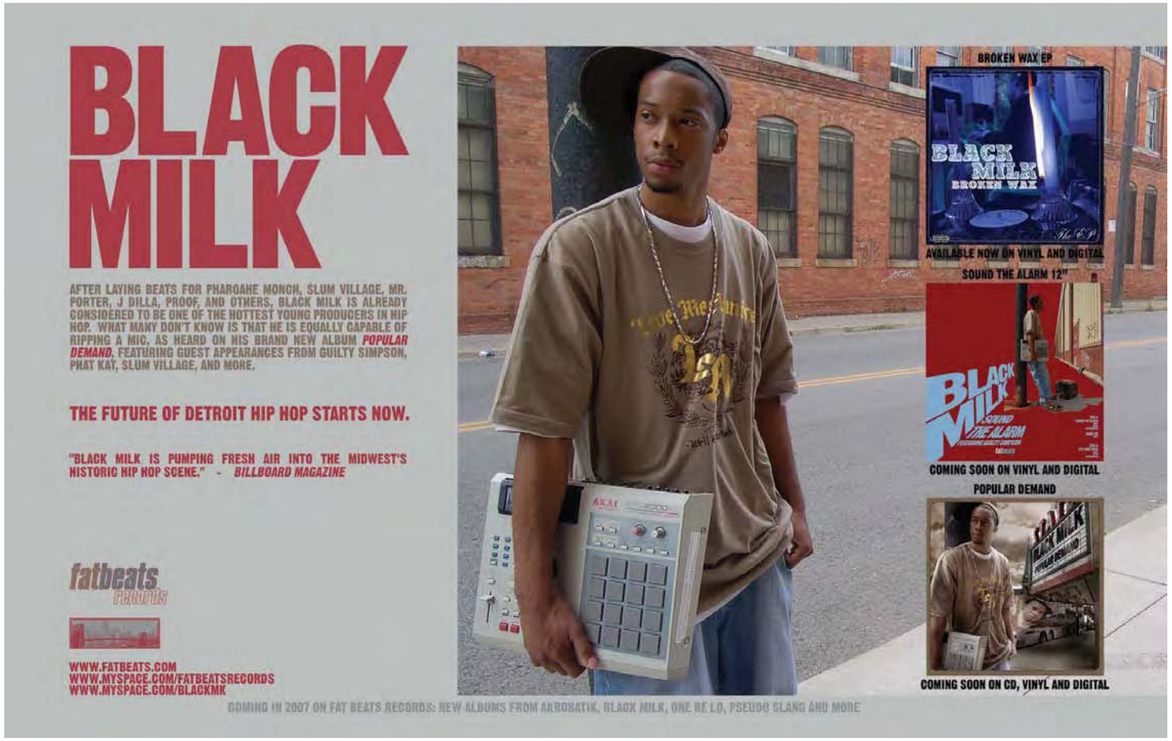
You see, I grew up in a part of Tikrit called Ali-Tazir. It was the lower-middle-class part of town, and I was often made fun of at school by the rich kids for my "tazzi" accent. My only escape from the boring lectures at school and my parents' complete apathy was music. I would often cut class to venture into Mehhid's and buy whatever single had the coolest-looking cover. Much of Iraqi pop music back then was kind of cheesy and bloated. No real substance. But then I found the import section. This turned my world upside down. There were bands with names like the MC5 and the Stooges. They wore leather jackets and played loud guitars. Noisy, dirty, brilliant! Detroit was a mythical place to me. I dreamed of living there and being in some band that played every night in the same bar. I spent every last dinar I had in that import section of Mehhid's. It was there where I met the guys who would later make up most of my government (the Ministers of Defense, Treasury, and Agriculture, to name a few). We saved up and bought some instruments of our own, putting together a group that was basically a poor imitation of the stuff that was coming out of New York and London. We wanted to be Stiff Little Fingers but ended up sounding like the Knack or something. But what do you want from a bunch of angry teenage tazzis? We went on to play some shows around the city and then eventually all around the country. We must have gone through three different vans! It was a great time for music and bands were forming all over the place. I want to thank anyone who ever booked us a show, hung up a flier, came out to see us, gave us a place to stay, or cooked us a meal. I am eternally grateful. Thanks to the band of course too (yes you, Sadiq! I won't mention your van stench. Oops!).

Much gratitude to Amira in the city of Rayat. My heart is always with you.

If I've forgotten to thank anyone else, forgive me, I'm old! Thanks for your time and long live the MC5!

TRANSLATION BY FRED ARMISEN

Illustration by Milano Chow


BLACK MILK
AFTER LAYING BEATS FOR PHAROAHE MONCH, SLUM VILLAGE, MR. PORTER, J DILLA, PROOF, AND OTHERS, BLACK MILK IS ALREADY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE HOTTEST YOUNG PRODUCERS IN HIP HOP. WHAT MANY DON'T KNOW IS THAT HE IS EQUALLY CAPABLE OF RIPPING A MIC, AS HEARD ON HIS BRAND NEW ALBUM POPULAR DEMAND, FEATURING GUEST APPEARANCES FROM GUILTY SIMPSON, PHAT KAT, SLUM VILLAGE, AND MORE.
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Bob Marley and The Wailers

Catch a Fire

11 SONGS, INCLUDING "STIR IT UP"

Even though the Wailers had been churning out albums in Jamaica for years — 1973's Catch a Fire was their "debut" for Island records. The album that exposed reggae to a worldwide audience (and finally made the Wailers some cash), it's as seminal as any of rock's great major label debuts. And it goes even better with potato chips.

BEST BUY ISLAND TUFF GONG

bobmarley.com islandrecords.com

BEST ALBUM OF THE MONTH: THE CLIPSE

JAY-Z
Kingdom Come
Def Jam

So the scoop is Jay-Z comes out of his pseudoretirement and makes an album that's, well, not good. Now not good by Hov standards means you still get stellar lyricism here, but overall the whole thing feels contrived. The sucker-for-love verse about Beyoncé on "Lost Ones" is an unbelievable turnoff, and the media sound bite on the dubious Hurricane Katrina track are far more moving than the rhymes. Then you get the mandatory duet with the wifey, which is useless of course, and a puzzling album closer produced by Chris Martin which sounds like a Cubase demo. Jigga says that the catalyst for this project was the good doctor Dre sending him beats. The problem is, all those beats are interchangeable and amazingly lackluster. On "30 Something," the Big Homie finally sets the record straight about his age and sort of kills it "Imaginary Player"-style, but after five songs of hearing him repeatedly threaten to spank little young'ns you begin to wonder if he enjoys it a bit too much. OK, now you can really retire.
DAVID DASH

THE GAME
Doctor's Advocate
Geffen

First, we wanted to know if there were going to be Dre tracks on here. The answer is a humiliating no, but the fake Dre beats by Scott Storch are better than the real Dre beats on Jay's album. Then we wanted to know if Game could make a catchy record without 50s poppy hooks. The answer is a resounding yes. This is the best West Coast album since, uh, Game's first album. Except that Blood sounds way tougher on this one and the tracklist doesn't read like some bogus A&R wish list. *Doctor's Advocate* is a hard, organic, and personal effort. And the title track is a case of emo rap that actually works.
BUSTA NUT

THE CLIPSE
Hell Hath No Fury
Jive

There you go: Album of the year. But you knew that already. That's that crack, that hard white, that raw uncut, and that fishscale all rolled into a dozen impeccable tracks of lyrical madness. Hardbody. Can we bring that word back?
BLAQUE PAK

BIRDMAN & LIL' WAYNE
Like Father, Like Son
Cash Money

I thought these kissing cousins' album was going to be corny, yo, but at press time "Stuntin Like My Daddy" is all over radio and it's perfect. The celebratory nouveau-Hot Boys production makes you ponder whether kicking Mannie Fresh out was the best thing Cash Money ever did. And if you wonder who's going to want to listen to Baby now that Lil' Wayne is the best rapper in the universe, well, Weezy dumbed his shit down and somehow it all really gels. He starts off single with unbelievable swagger: "Bitch I'm paid/ that's all I gotta say/ can't see you little niggas/ the money in the way," and it's on and poppin from there. The whole thing culminates when he goes: "Who want it? Show me my opponent," then you hear a crunching sound, and then, with his mouth full, homeboy repeats: "Show me my opponent!" Add 15 tracks along those lines and you get an idea of the album.
WHOADIE ALLEN

LUPE FIASCO
Food & Liquor
Atlantic

Here's a guy who thinks too much. Sure, his concepts and cadences are way impressive, but he caught an L on

WORST ALBUM OF THE MONTH: JELLO BIAFRA

sales. You don't wanna go down like the next Canibus. So just rap, homie.
YOUNG NIZZLE

ELECTRONIC

MUM
The Peel Sessions
Fatcat

As irritating as it is over here, can you imagine how done Iceland must be with all this anemic, pseudolectronic whalesong shit? I mean, at least with something like black metal you can laugh at it until it goes away, but what are you going to do with these guys, sleep them off the stage? It just won't happen.
HAGAR SLACHS

LANSING-DREIDEN
D.I. by D.D.
Lansing-Dreiden

Goddammit, the first band to pull off faceless, mysterioso art collective since Art of Noise and they bring in fucking Dazzle D to hip-hoppify their last album. I guess it's true what they say, you can take the boys out of Miami, but you can't keep the Miami from dumping its tacky, remixed garbage all over good music.
THELDON BOIS

SINOIA CAVES
The Enchanter Persuade
Brah

This is a new side project from one of the guys in Vancouver funsters Black Mountain. I don't know if I'd exactly call laying out gentle, Eno-style soundscapes "analog synth wizardry" as its promo sticker so boasts, but it's definitely the work of at least a level-five cleric.
LEON SPHINCTS

HARD STUFF

JOE SATRIANI
Satriani Live!
Epic

YES! Keep it up, Satch! Keep up the endless blaze of mind-numbing, whammy'd-out noodling for two entire trekkie-amazing discs of go-nowhere excitement and don't let anyone tell you you're a balding, self-important clown and the butt of a joke you helped create.
TOM LANKHARD

THE EVENS
Get Evens
Dischord

You know who I hate more than those folks who get all huffy and claim Ian Mackaye killed punk cause he made it unpopular for one brief moment in the 80s to be a wife-beating junkie ripping off gay-hustler fashion who thinks singing about sex-addled vagaries like "power" and "excitement" somehow puts them on par with Albert fucking, fucking, fucking Schweitzer? Myself.
BLANDO CAL'DISSIAN

JOSEF K
Entomology
Domino

I'm kind of surprised it took somebody this long to dig these guys up. They're old buds of fellow Glaswegians like Orange Juice and Aztec Camera, but with a little less sass and a LOT more snoot. They would have been the perfect band for dickheads to pretend they'd "always been into" back when everyone was trying to do that gloomy dance-punk thing a few years back.
ABBIE RHEINGOLD

Bob Marley and The Wailers

Exodus

10 SONGS, INCLUDING "JAMMING"

Voted the most important album of the 20th century by the music experts at *Time* Magazine, Exodus is Bob Marley's personal masterpieces. Bob's concept album about the African diaspora and all the shared experiences of its people is 46 minutes of sublime perfection – with a message. Very necessary.

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Bob Marley and The Wailers

Legend

14 SONGS, INCLUDING "NO WOMAN, NO CRY"

Probably the quintessential *greatest hits* album in popular music. Legend *IS* Bob Marley – a career spanning epic that translates the heart and soul of the Jamaican people into music. If you're going to own one reggae album (and we recommend you own lots), this is it.

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BEST COVER OF THE MONTH: SINOIA CAVES

ICEAGE COBRA
Brilliant Ideas From Amazing People
Iceage Cobra

Maybe this is just pandering to stereotypes, but doesn't it seem like a garage band dedicated to restoring rock 'n' roll to its primal, raucous origin would be willing to write out the word "shit" in their own liner notes?
CAMMA TURKIN

WINNEBAGO DEAL
Flight of the Raven
Fierce Panda

In terms of vacancy, it's pretty hard to top misspelling "reaper" in a song title where it's the only word, but including a credit for the person who made the "raven scream" on one of the tracks and doing your cover art on MS Paint are a good start. BTW, these would all be total plusses if the band in question was a Cryptic Slaughter tribute act made up of teenagers from rural Michigan instead of former Oxford students riding the coattails of their friendship with that guy from Queens of the Stone Age.
ALICE SMARKSON

JELLO BIAFRA
In the Grip of Official Treason
Alternative Tentacles

Somehow I made it past the "subversive" collage of 50s-style American icons on the cover, past the photos of torn-up, post-Katrina New Orleans paired with shots of the clean, touristy French Quarter (ouch!) on the inside cover, past the fake iPod ad with the hooded Abu Ghraib guy on the disc itself, past the two-minute introduction by Fat Mike laying into the college that apparently hosted the speech—all without so much as a cough. I really thought I was in the clear, but the second Jello's little Fred-Schneider tremolo came piercing its way through my headphones I swear I gagged so hard I thought my head was trying to escape the rest of my body.
BOBBY THANDS

VARIOUS ARTISTS
7" Up
Crippled Dick Wax

This is a collection of singles from a bunch of bands of that Wire/Young Marble Giants school of taut British art rock that nobody but the drandruffest, most crotch-smellingly nerdy record snobs have thought about since the early 80s. Sigh, why doesn't anybody make songs that double as anti-syphilis PSAs anymore?
LEROY GUMPTION

THE HEARTACHES
Too Cool For School
Swami

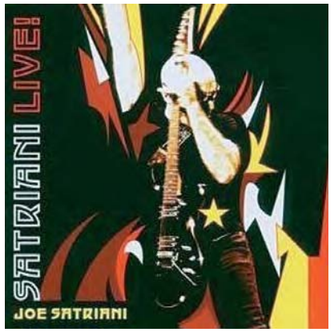
Hey Reverend Phelps and buddies, I've got an idea. If you are so concerned about fags, why not champion this band rather than handing signs to pre-schoolers to hold up as backdrops to a homokiss photo op? If poppy punk still sounded like this, 13-year-old boys would be wearing leather jackets and drinking Buds instead of applying makeup and straightening each other's hair. Head 'em off at the pass, Freddy!
DAISUKE MATSUZAKA

SOFT STUFF

ANDY PARTRIDGE
Fuzzy Warbles Collectors' Album
Ape House

Jesus, I like XTC as much as the next pretentious asshole, but an eight-disc collection of Partridge solo stuff? This is like the Anglophile equivalent of being forced to smoke a whole carton of cigarettes by your dad. Rest assured if so much as an incidental "Mum" ever crosses my lips again, it'll be riding the crest of a wave of Pavlovian vomit.
BENNIFER CHEEVEY

WORST COVER OF THE MONTH: JOE SATRIANI



WHITE FLIGHT
White Flight
Rangelife

This is exactly the sound my mind makes every time I hear one of those zero-population-growth folks spouting off about only having one kid—the sound of an only child so thoroughly spoiled, the idea that anything he just bellows out in a studio might suck hasn't even entered his head. I mean, really, wouldn't we all just rather relegate ourselves to some shanty-town dystopia?
HAGGARD D. ENKIN

NOAH GEORGESON
Find Shelter
Plain

With everyone past 30 busting their ass trying to out-young each other these days, it's nice to hear someone putting out some solidly adult jammers that sound like Lee Hazelwood doing karaoke over old movie scores. All the better if he's barely in his 20s, we need some fresh curmudgeons to balance out all these gurps before playing Xbox becomes our national anthem.
TETOR HUSSER

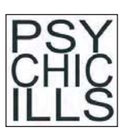
SLOAN
Never Hear the End of It
Yep Roc

Can somebody explain how anyone anywhere liked this band ever? They feel like some bad joke band about how toothless and watered-down we're supposed to assume Canadian rock would be that'd be played by the members of some barely better American band on *SNL*. They've even got the exact glasses they'd use to nerd up the other band's singer. Actually the only missing pieces of the equation are for all their songs to be passive aggressive-knocks on the US and at least two of the members to be brothers.
KERNEL POLLACK

WEIRD STUFF

PRURIENT
Pleasure Ground
Load

You ever do that thing when you're waiting for someone in the car where you crank up something like Prurient or To Live and Shave in LA and pretend like you're on the verge of breakdown in an art film and just stare off ahead like these are your thoughts and then right as the person you're waiting on opens the door you snap it off and turn to them like "Oh, hey, how's it going?" Isn't it weird how even if they haven't heard the noise on the way up they still get wigged out? Maybe that's not the "right" reason to be into stuff like this, but good fuck does it never get old.
HELLOISE



PSYCHIC ILLS
Early Violence
Social Registry

Chicago has this thing they always do where they'll crap out one genuinely awesome band then spend the next eight years spawning nothing but horrible imitators. They did it with Big Black, followed by a near decade of all those pigfuck bands, then again with Tortoise and all those damn pseudo-jazz acts, and now if history serves as any indication, we can all thank Psychic Ills for the upcoming wave of godawful krauty jam acts.
BELLER RENTGENCHENLEN

Bob Marley and The Wailers

Rastaman Vibration

10 SONGS, INCLUDING "WAR"

Rastaman Vibration was Bob Marley's most popular album in America. An avocation of Marley's Rastafarian faith, it's also represents a great musical maturation for Marley, delving into the polyrhythms that the Wailers made a late-career staple.

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VELVET

Continued from pg. 58

and they'd attack people but she was a small dog, not meant to be small, a German shepherd, the dog of anti-Semitism, except that's such an insult to her because she was never going to be used to hurt Jews and I have a friend who was in jail in South America and the police used German shepherds to attack and frighten the prisoners and I'd die before I'd let that happen to her, but there's the big, angry dogs who kill without meaning anything, who'd rip someone apart, tear out their necks and pull off their arms and she'd never do that, except that she had a tragic life because I gave her one, I gave her a tragic life, and I'm the one who's guilty, not her. I see people playing with their dogs and I want her to have that sweet kind of life but she couldn't have it because of me, because I wasn't sweet with a sweet life and the boy I lived with wasn't sweet either. He wanted a big dog, a dangerous dog, an aggressive dog, a master of aggression like he himself was. He wasn't small for his breed or cute or sweet, he didn't have a sweet life but he didn't want one. He was a big dog, aggressive and mean. I was nothing but he wasn't nothing. How did I end up here? The girls talk about love and all that.

ANDREA DWORKIN

Vice: Was this man so brutal in real life?

John: *I believe so. Andrea went to a palm reader once, and she was told that she was going to have very important relationships with two tall, blond men. This brutal husband of hers was the first and I was the second. In terms of stature, we were more alike than different. During the first ten years Andrea and I lived together, it wasn't uncommon for me to walk into the bedroom and for her to wake up totally alarmed because she believed I was this husband of hers. I took that to be her body's sense memory of something that was so horrible that the slightest little thing could trigger it.*

A lot of women have reacted to the extremeness of Andrea's life, and have a hard time comprehending. "How could so much bad happen to one person?" On the other hand, she has a wide readership of women to whom worse has happened.

What was Andrea like in person?

So sweet and funny. She knew me better than I know myself.

Dworkin's book Intercourse, *is being reprinted by Basic Books later this year.*

CRUSHED MEXICAN SPIDERS

Continued from pg. 103

able, no one was there, or an unfriendly voice would deny the person she was looking for. Finally, she returned to her office hoping to spend the night there, but when her key froze in the lock of the front door she wasn't surprised.

There was one last call to make, the one she dreaded most of all. When a strange voice answered her parents' number, she knew they were gone as well.

She caught the last train back to Brixton, and in the passageway between the two platforms, she sank down and gave way to tears.

TIBOR FISCHER

So what in the hell happened?

I'm not going to explain it. You can give people a couple clues about a novel, but if you start explaining a short story, there's nothing left.

Just tell me. I won't put it in the magazine. *No…*

Do you have a notion of what it's about? *I do, yes.*

Ugh. Do you hate London as much as the speaker in this? *Pretty much. I mean, I've lived in London most of my life. I am tired of it. It's become sort of the capital of Europe, which is good in that it's very lively and everything is here, but it's also become incredibly crowded. I spend most of my time in Budapest or abroad.*

NAKEDNESS

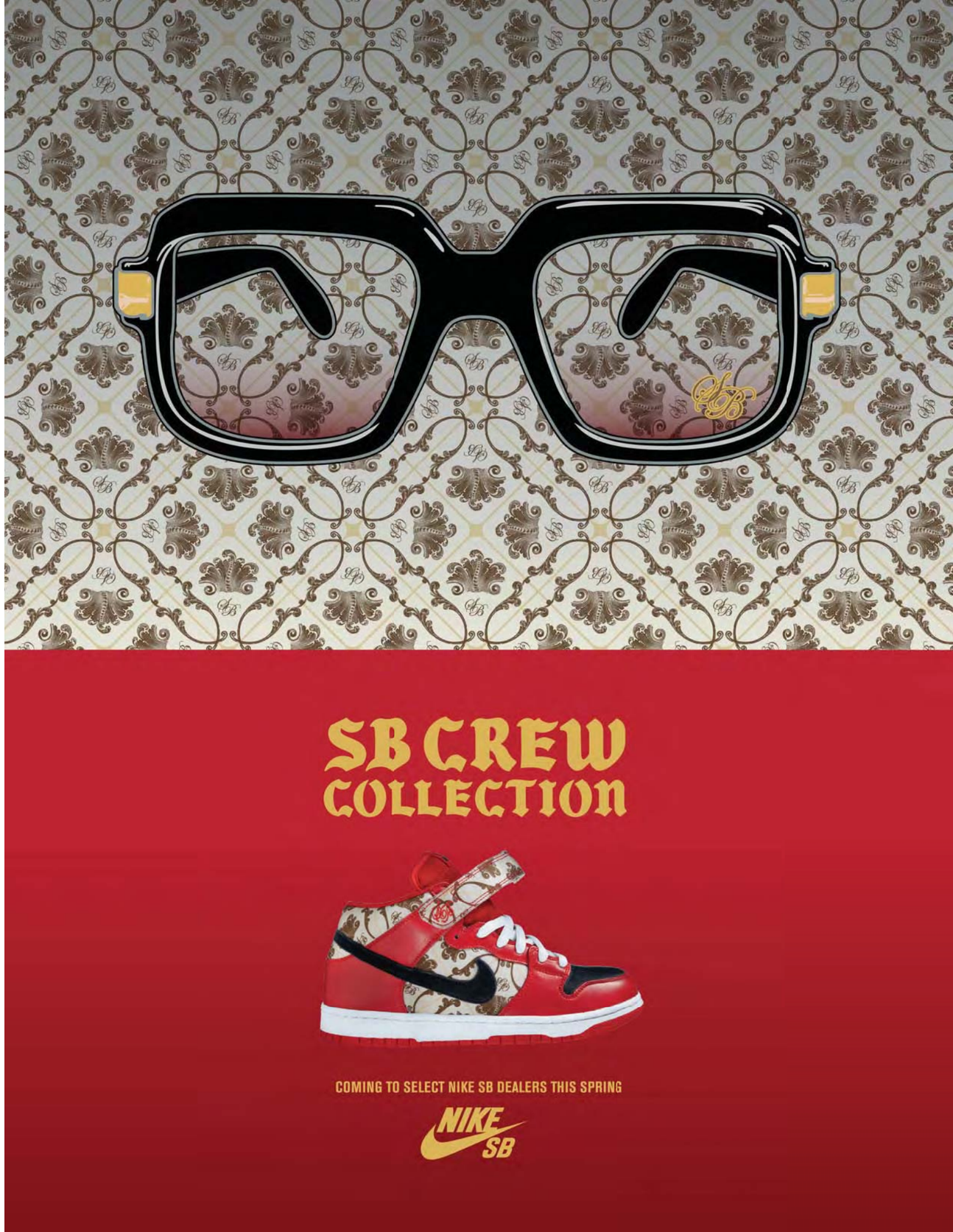
Continued from pg. 104

much of the pubic hair turning gray, the beginning of a turkey neck, and so on. And I never say anything about the changes in her body, which haven't been much. She still has no gray hairs, or maybe just a few in front, though the blond hair when I first met her is now, except for her eyebrows, light brown. She hasn't gained weight or developed a paunch, her legs and butt are still pretty good, her breasts seem a little larger and have fallen somewhat but are still attractive, and her face and neck show no signs of aging either. Well, she is nine years younger than me. Anyway, don't take your clothes off in the kitchen no matter how late at night unless the light's off and they're also off in the rooms on either side of it. That's what I learned from that scene I imagined, and also don't think you'll ever have the body you once had or even close to it except the upper arms, besides… besides what? Nothing. It's ridiculous looking in the mirror except to shave. Everything's changed, you're getting old, in ways you're already old, and nothing you do—no exercise, no diet—will bring any of it back or do anything to stop it. That's a dumb thought. Go to sleep. Washes his face, brushes his teeth, flosses, uses the water pick, brushes his hair a few strokes—don't need a mirror for that—goes into the bedroom, puts his pen, watch, and handkerchief on his night table, gets tomorrow's long-sleeve t-shirt out of a dresser drawer and drapes it over his lampshade, gets in bed, picks up his book and opens it to the pages a strip of torn paper's sticking out between, tries to remember which paragraph he was reading when he started dozing off last night, can't and just starts reading the first complete sentence on the left page. "Don't you want to go to sleep?" his wife says, on her side with her back to him. "Light keeping you up?" "No, I can fall back to sleep. Just thought it'd give us a chance to snuggle." "I'll shut the light if you let me put my hand inside your shirt till we're both asleep, right?" "Only if you turn off the light now." "If I read a couple more pages and then shut off the light?" "Outside, not inside." "But the deal is I get to keep my hand inside your shirt until we're both asleep, right?" "Okay." He moves his two pillows closer to hers, shuts the light and snuggles up to her and puts his hand inside her shirt and fondles and then holds her left breast and then her right one and then both with one hand and feels himself going to sleep. Her last words to him, or the last he hears, are "That's better, isn't it?"

STEPHEN DIXON

Vice: I've heard from a couple of good people that you are one of the best writing teachers in America.

Stephen: *That's nice to hear. I don't know how true it is, but it is nice. The first thing I do is tell the students not to worry, that they would have to work hard not to get an 'A' in my class. Then I work with a series of exercises and assignments so that my students can really write fiction. They start writing right away. If they turn in something late, that's OK too, because writers don't write on a timetable. I give detailed criticism, look at punctuation, and treat all of my students like real apprentices.*



Reunited.

Last photographed together in Mexico City (Sofia's hometown), the girls are seen here in Montreal (Valeria's hometown). When Sofia (left), one of our original store employees from Mexico, couldn't get a visa for the U.S., she headed to Canada to meet up with her friend. The pair are wearing two new dresses: the Criss-Cross and the Turtleneck, available online and at our stores.

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